

1 & 2 Thessalonians: A Commentary

The Beginnings of Christian Literature:
*Gratitude – Encouragement – Reminders – Warnings –
Clarifications - Recommendations*

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1 Thessalonians

Introduction

In 146 B.C., Macedonia was organized as a Roman province and Thessalonica became the capital. This significant seaport city, originally known as Therma, was initially the capital of only one of the divisions of Macedonia, eventually becoming the capital of the entire province. It was re-named Thessalonica in 315 B.C. by Cassander, the de facto ruler of southern Greece from 317-297. He chose the name in honor of his wife, Thessalonike. She was the daughter of Philip of Macedon and the sister of Alexander the Great.

Its geographical location played perhaps the major factor in its cosmopolitan or widely spread influence. The main Roman road (Via Egnatia) formed the east-west land bridge between Rome and Byzantium. It connected the city to the eastern provinces and impacted its wealth and other commercial enterprises. The population of Thessalonica in the first century was about 200,000. Paul came here on his second missionary journey. Age-old cults, philosophies, political and civic affairs, religious gods and goddesses, and divine devotion to the Roman emperor were all alive and well in this city. Especially in light of this divine devotion, “in such an environment, to preach Christianity was tantamount to treason” (Holmes, 19).

All that we know about the founding of the church in the city of Thessalonica is found in Acts 17:1-10. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were partners in founding the church here. They had come from Philippi after experiencing persecution and other ill treatments. After arriving in the city, they proclaimed the gospel and again experienced fierce opposition. They remained here for several weeks, however, and expended much energy and formed intense relations with the local Christians.

This city is mentioned in the NT: Acts 17:1, 11, 13; 27:2; Phi. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:10. Today it is known as Thessaloniki or Saloniki. It is the second largest city in Greece and the capital of the geographic region of Macedonia. Indeed, as Bishop Meletius of Antioch (360-381) once said, “As long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and fortunate” (Lightfoot, 255). It remains so to this day.

Authorship

As indicated above, the three had partnered in founding the church. It would only be normal, then, that all three collaborated in writing both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Unless one holds the divine dictation perspective on scripture writing, it is relatively easy to see these three shared ideas with one another and pointed out perspectives from their own viewpoints. Even though Paul himself may have formulated their discussions or interactions into the final form within these letters, such shared input should not be viewed as threatening in any way regarding the inspiration of the writings.

Furthermore, “the plural ‘we,’ meaning Paul and companions, is found more often in these Thessalonian letters than in any others written by him” (Bailey, 246). It is interesting that in light of these potentially semi-co-authored writings, Paul does not isolate or identify himself as either “apostle” or “servant” of Jesus Christ. What would account for this absence?

2 Corinthians 1:19 indicates that Silvanus was a companion of Paul in the preaching of

the gospel in Corinth. Silvanus was the Roman name for the Greek name Silas. He is called Silas in Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 34, 40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5. He is called Silvanus in 2 Cor. 1:19, 1 The. 1:1; 2 The. 1:1; 1 Pt. 5:12. So, Silas/Silvanus was somewhat connected with Paul in his ministries in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. As a partner with Paul in ministry, did he not ever interact with Paul about ideas in scripture writing formulations?

Timothy, on the other hand, was a constant companion of Paul. Paul had met him in Lystra and was recommended by those in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-4). He took Mark's place after Mark departed with Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts. 15:39). He was also connected with Paul in the Corinthian correspondences (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1). He was also with Paul when he wrote letters to the Romans (16:21), Colossians (1:1), Philemon (v. 1), and Philippians (1:1). In light of all these connections, did Timothy never share his perspectives and experiences or interact with Paul in scripture writing formulations?

Chronological Sequence

There has been considerable debate over the years concerning which of these two letters was written first (cp. Bruce, 37-45; Hobbs, 261; Holmes, 27-28; Morris, 37-41; Guthrie, 575-578; Kummel, 263-264; Moffatt, 10-11). Since there has never been a definitive conclusion in this regard, this commentary will follow the traditional order for at least three reasons: (1) The problems in 1 Thessalonians seem to have deepened in 2 Thessalonians; (2) 2 Thessalonians 2:15 indicates that Paul had previously written to the church and may likely be referring to 1 Thessalonians; (3) the personal references in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 are more appropriate in a first letter.

Reasons for Writing

On his first trip to Thessalonica, Paul had been warmly welcomed by the majority of Christians. However, the fruitfulness of his brief time there had generated some degree of suspiciousness and envy on the part of a number of others – both Christians and non-Christians. In order to either prevent or escape persecution, Paul was forced to leave the city. He went approximately fifty miles south westward to Berea and then to Athens and Corinth.

However, this departure from Thessalonica was most difficult, despite its necessity. As Moffatt (4-5) reminds us:

From no church did Paul tear himself with such evident reluctance. His anxiety to get back to it was not simply due to the feeling that he must go on with the Macedonian mission, if at all possible, but to his deep affection for the local community. The Macedonian churches may almost be termed Paul's favorites. None troubled him less. None came so near to his heart. At Thessalonica the exemplary character of the Christians, their rapid growth, their exceptional opportunities, and their widespread reputation, moved him to a pardonable pride.

For an impressive portrayal of Macedonia and Thessalonica, see Renan's *St. Paul* (pp. 109-123), and Dobschutz's *Christian Life in the Primitive Church* (pp. 81-98).

So, with understandably deep, genuine concern over the welfare of his friends in Thessalonica, he sent his associate Timothy to learn of their condition. His other associate Silas or Silvanus had been sent to Philippi on a similar mission. Upon hearing about their situation in Thessalonica, Paul decided to write them a letter.

First Thessalonians was apparently written for eight primary reasons: (1) to share his delight and gratitude for their faithfulness to the gospel; (2) to encourage them in the face of false charges or accusations against Paul and his associates; (3) to offer encouragement in the face of persecutions, the need for endurance, and to not grow faithhearted; (4) to remind them of the importance of purity in life; (5) to beware of religious frauds and scam artists; (6) to clarify information about the death of fellow-believers; (7) to provide comments about the return of Jesus; and (8) to make behavioral recommendations between fellow-believers.

Second Thessalonians was apparently written for three primary reasons: (1) to provide additional encouragement with continuing problems of persecution (perhaps more intense or widespread); (2) to offset misunderstandings about the return of Jesus as far as the "lack of industry" (Wycliffe, 803) by some was concerned; (3) to make additional behavioral recommendations for some in the congregation.

There is almost universal agreement among biblical scholars that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were the first Christian writings (Plummer, xiii; Bengel, 474). Indeed, as Goodspeed remarks, "With these two short letters Paul began Christian literature" (6).

I Thessalonians
Scripture in a Structural Format

Salutation (1:1)

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- II CONDUCT AT THESSALONICA (2:1-16)
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- IV CALL OF THESSALONIANS (4:1-12)
 - A. Christian Example (4:1-2)
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 - D. Consequence (4:12)
- V COMING OF CHRIST FOR THESSALONIANS (4:13-5:11)
 - A. Clarification about Return of Christ (4:13-18)
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- VI CONDITIONS FOR HARMONY AT THESSALONICA (5:12-22)
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I Thessalonians

A Commentary

Salutation (1:1)

V. 1: “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace”

Due to the absence of any challenges at Thessalonica regarding his apostolic authority, and the most cordial relationship Paul had with them, he does not, in these opening words, designate himself as an “apostle.” He uses the term in the plural in 2:6, but that was not regarded as a necessity at the beginning of this letter. His plural use of the term in 2:6 is even inclusive of Silvanus and Timothy (see Authorship) and almost as a reluctant footnote: “could have” (Williams) or “might have” (KJV, NASB).

While the term “apostle” is not used in 5:27, it seems implied as he ‘orders’ or ‘charges’ that this letter be read to all the brothers.

The word “church” is not without major vibrations. It is mentioned in the singular here and in the plural in 2:14. As Paul Wernie notes, “No Christian could have fought his way through the great dark night of idolatry and immorality as an isolated unit; the community was here the necessary condition for all permanent life” (189). Indeed, all the “grace and peace” that was common to one and all and was interdependently needed to hold all of them together was rooted solely and exclusively in “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Clark (257) offers these profound insights into the nature of the Christian church:

(a) It is a fellowship. It was born in a world divided racially, culturally, and socially, but was strikingly different, for it was poor in money, it was rich in friendship. Brotherliness was not merely a characteristic but its essence. Its fellowship transcended rank, wealth, color, and culture. (b) It is a fellowship around a Person. ‘I am the vine, you are the branches’ (John 15:5). Fellowship in the congregation is dependent upon fellowship with its Head. A Christian congregation is where two or three are gathered together, with Jesus in the midst. It is not constituted by numbers or organizations, but by the spirit of the members and their relationship with its Leader and Lord. (c) It is a fellowship around a Person who can give it the shepherd heart, the serving hand, the burden-bearing back, the questioning mind. Its concern is with all of life. Its responsibility is for all the world. It can be the sympathizer and champion of every good cause, and the unrelenting, intelligent, and powerful enemy of every evil one.

The preposition “in” “is used not only of individuals but also of churches (e. g. Gal. i. 22, here)” (Moule 80). It appears once in this verse and is used in a singular, collective manner to stress or accent the sphere of divine nature or essence of the godhood of both.

That is, the words “God the Father” are intimately linked with the three other terms: “Lord” (the word for “God” in the OT); “Jesus” (the personal name for God in the flesh); “Christ” (God’s anointed and ordained One and only OT Messiah).

The word “grace” (*charis*) depicts the unmerited favor of God in calling people to Himself, forgiving them, and declaring them righteous through obedient-based faith (see my commentary on Romans on my website for a beautifully expanded portrayal of this significant truth: archive.org/details/@mandm313).

The word “peace” (*eirene*) is a summary term for “the spiritual prosperity enjoyed by the recipients of the divine favour” (Frame, 71). It is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 14:27 and Paul in Philippians 4:7.

So, this salutation or “introduction is brief, but rich and gracious and pitches the letter at once on a high plane” (Robertson, 7).

I CONVERSION OF THESSALONIANS (1:2-10)

A. Exclamations of Gratitude (1:2-3)

V. 2: “We are always giving thanks to God for all of you, being mindful [of you] in our prayers”

The present tense verb, coupled with the word “always,” serve to stress the ongoing nature of the prayer life of these three (“we”) as they reflect on the conversion of these Thessalonians. It was “a constant attitude” (Milligan, 5) of prayer and was inclusive (“all of you”). As Frame (75) frames it, “each time that they are engaged in prayer, the writers mention the names of the converts.” This, of course, is common with Paul. With the sole exception of the letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul typically includes an exclamation of gratitude.

V. 3: “Constantly remembering your work of faith and labor of love and endurance/persererance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father”

It is highly likely that 1 Thessalonians was Paul’s first written letter. In this early verse he introduces a theological trio – “faith, love, and hope” – which he will later elaborate and/or expand in 1 Corinthians 13.

First, “work of faith” refers to work which is a consequence of or verification of the reality of faith. Frame (76) calls it “the activity that faith inspires, that is, love in all its manifestations.”

Second, “labor of love” refers to labor or “costly exertion” (*kopou*) of energy in the Christian endeavor, as compared to the general term (*ergou*) for normal Christian activity. Frame (76) calls it “the toilsome activity prompted by love.”

Third, “endurance/perseverance of hope” refers to that steadfastness of spirit which overflows from the Christian hope (*elpis* – “confident assurance”). It seems to have an eschatological tone here. After all, their hope or confident assurance “was in Jesus, whom they believed would soon return from heaven to

bring about their deliverance (cf. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:3-10)” (Wanamaker, 76). Airhart (441) pitches the thrust of this theological trio onto the following plate:

Outward evidence of inward and eternal Christian values was to be found by observing the daily lives of these converts: their transformed activities, their loving toil, their endurance under pressure. True faith will be evidenced by corresponding works; but mere ‘good works’ which do not spring from faith will lack spiritual fruitage; divinely implanted love will call forth costly exertions; lesser motives will fail under testing. Christian hope will hold men steady under stress; mere human idealism cracks under pressure.

The expression “before our God and Father” indicates that “these manifestations of the Christian life of the Thessalonians are thus viewed in their immediate relation to God; God is made a witness of their conduct” (Stevens, 21). Eadie’s claim that “faith is child-like, hope is saint-like, but love is God-like” (38) may be an oversimplification of Paul’s intention. However, the priority of love is something which Paul solidifies in 1 Corinthians 13, so, Eadie’s claim may have more merit than not.

Nevertheless, as Robertson notes, “the picture here is the day of judgment when all shall appear before God” (9). Living in the light of God’s presence is something which occurs on a day-to-day basis already. The final or ultimate manifestation of His presence on the day of judgment, and the judgment which follows, will be consistent with what transpired in His presence on the basis of daily living prior to this day.

B. Elected by God (1:4-6)

V. 4: “Knowing your election, brothers [who are] loved by God”

The word “knowing” (*eidotes*) is a participle in the perfect tense which indicates an existing state or condition of utter, absolute knowledge and assurance about God’s election or choosing of his readers for His love.

Besides here, the word “election” (*eklogen*) occurs in the NT only six other times: Ac. 9:15; Ro. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 2 Pt. 1:10. The word indicates God’s choice or God Who takes the initiative in the bestowal of His love to others. God’s love is not determined by human merit and it does not fluctuate according to the whims of human dispositions. His love is rooted in His will, and according to Eph. 1:4, this election occurred before the foundation of the world. It is crystal clear, therefore, that “Paul attributes the fact that his readers are Christians to God’s choice of them . . . This choice rests upon God’s love and not on any worth of the recipients” (Marshall, 52-53).

The verb “loved” (*hegapemenoï*) occurs also in 4:9. Its noun form (*agapes*) was just mentioned in v. 3. So, God’s election is centered and anchored in

His love.

For opposite viewpoints on the nature of election see: Stagg, 84-88; Boettner, 84-149; Calvin, 203-206, 212, 239, 214, 245, 249, 262, 257, 277, 478, 562.

The word “brothers” (*adelphoi*), a term of endearment and existing spiritual relationship, occurs eighteen other times in this letter: 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:2 7; 4:1, 6, 10 (twice), 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 26, 27. Although frequently translated “brothers,” it “is in fact inclusive of the whole community, men and women alike” (Holmes, 49). Beck translates, “fellow Christians.” The Message translates, “friends.”

So, this plural term “brothers/fellow Christians” indicates that the “election” and “love” are oriented toward the whole of God’s people and are not focused on individuals.

V. 5: “that our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full assurance, just as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake”

Paul now, in vs. 5-6, pinpoints reasons as to why he is in an existing state or condition of utter, absolute knowledge and assurance about God’s election or choosing of his readers as the objects of His love (v. 4).

“Our gospel” indicates that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had personally experienced God’s Gospel and could not separate themselves from it; they were one with it and had expressed to the readers what they themselves had experienced. This same gospel is called “the gospel of God” in 2:2, 8, 9, and “the gospel of Christ” in 3:2.

In this verse, Paul singles out four facets of the gospel, as far as his readers were concerned: (1) “did not come to you in word only” – That is, words alone were not sufficient – then or now. But they are one necessary element in the proclamation of the gospel. His readers had not been content to simply hear the words as “mere human argument or eloquence” (Airhart, 444). To have done so would have only led to mere human results. (2) “in power” – The word “power” (*dunamis*) means “ability.” They had responded to the words of the gospel in such a way that God had transformed their lives. He alone has the ability to do such. (3) “in the Holy Spirit” – This ability to transform or change lives is due to God the Holy Spirit’s invigorating and dynamic work. Rather than continuing to be dominated by the power or ability of evil forces to ruin lives, they submitted themselves wholeheartedly to the Holy Spirit. (4) “in full assurance” – Cremer (502) defines the word (*plerophoria*) as “**perfect certitude, full conviction.**” Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (676) suggest “*certainty, with full conviction.*” This not only refers to the internal experience of assurance and conviction which his readers had but also to the fact that Paul and his associates “had full assurance that in the Holy Spirit the gospel was a transforming power. They preached it, and the response of their hearers affirmed this” (Hobbs, 267). Indeed, Morris (57) suggests that the “primary

meaning is the assurance that the Spirit gave to the preachers, for Paul is dealing with the way he and his companions came to know the election of the Thessalonians.”

Paul’s closing comments indicate that his readers had “experiential knowledge” (*oidate*) that the message they had delivered to them by Paul and his associates was for their sakes. “This was in contrast with the itinerant teachers of the day who made a living by espousing novel philosophies (cf. 2:1-12)” (Airhart, 444) – not “that they might gain them for Christ” (Stevens, 22). In other words, “we sought not our own profit or advantage, but your spiritual good” (Gloag, 3).

V. 6: “and you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of [the] Holy Spirit”

In this verse, Paul adds a (5) way by which he and his associates knew that his readers had been elected by God.

The word “imitators” (*mimitai*) occurs only 5 other times in the NT: 2:14; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Heb. 6:12. The word means “to copy, to follow, to mimic.” To expect people to imitate you is an expectation few can scarcely afford to have. Paul’s expectation should be understood in the same way he worded it in 1 Cor. 11:1 – “even as I also am of Christ.” So, Paul adds the phrase, “and of the Lord” with the same essential meaning as in 1 Cor. 11:1 for clarification sake. Robertson’s words are sobering enough: “The peril of it all is that people so easily and so readily imitate the preacher when he does not imitate the Lord” (11). Airhart’s admonition is urgent: “The life of Christ must be, so to speak, reincarnated in the consistent example of His disciples. We [Christians] are the only Bible the careless world will read” (444).

These 5-fold ways by which he and his associates knew that the readers had been elected by God are predicated upon them “having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit.”

The word “received” (*dexamenoi*) denotes that they had welcomed the word of God despite “much affliction” (*thlipsei polle*). The word “affliction” means to be hard pressed; to squeeze; “crushing pressure” (Airhart, 445). It refers to “the relentless pressure to which a believer may be exposed in a world opposed to Christ” (Wycliffe, 807). It indicates “distress that is brought about by outward circumstances, and mental and spiritual states of mind” (BAG, 362-363).

However, “the affliction which his readers had suffered had been accepted, not in regret and sad resignation, but in the joy that was the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives” (Bailey, 262). This is the same type joy which Paul had experienced and expressed in Rom. 5:3. As Wycliffe notes, “affliction cannot dampen the true joy of the Spirit (Jn. 16:33; Acts 16:23-25; Gal. 5:22; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:19-21)” (807). Moffatt calls it “the paradox of experience” (24).

C. Examples of Godliness (1:7-9)

V. 7: “Accordingly ye became an example to all those in Macedonia and in Achaia who have faith [in God]”

The word “accordingly” (*hoste*) expresses one of the results of their conversion to the Christian faith, a result which is in accordance with what is proper or which fits the norm or standard within and among “the company of the committed” (Elton Trueblood): “an example.” Cp. Trueblood’s *The Incendiary Fellowship*.

The word “example” (*tupon*) refers to “a pattern, model, standard” which is worthy to be followed. Although the word is singular, its collective sense is without question: “the experience of the community as a whole” (Wanamaker, 82; Robertson, 12). Having this designation applied so soon to a relatively young church is remarkable. Faithfulness yields fruitfulness – in many different ways. At this time, Macedonia was the northern part of ancient Greece with Thessalonica as its seaport capital. News spread rapidly from this significant location. Achaia was the southern part with Corinth as its capital. Thus, another significant seaport site.

V. 8: “since the word of the Lord has been sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place your faith toward God is gone forth, so that [there is] no need to have to say anything”

The phrase “the word of the Lord” is another way of referring to the message of the gospel (v. 5). It may mean the gospel message which proceeds from Him or the gospel message which is about Him.

The word “sounded forth” (*exechetai*) means “a loud, unmistakable proclamation” (Vincent, 17). This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. Wanamaker suggests that “in every place” refers to a “going forth in all directions . . . to the wider Christian community” (83) beyond Macedonia and Achaia. Gloag notes that “this does not intimate that the Thessalonians by their missionary activity disseminated the gospel, but that from them locally the gospel had spread” (3). It could include both ideas. A choice may not be necessary. Since their “faith toward God” was so well known, and seemingly with great respect and appreciation, Paul declined to add any additional comments in this regard.

V. 9: “for they themselves keep on telling about the reception we had with you, and how you turned toward God from the idols to serve a living and genuine God”

Rather than Paul and his associates sounding forth the good news about the conversion of the Thessalonians, it was an apparent multitude (“they”) of other

people in Macedonia and Achaia who were spreading this good news. In this verse, Paul notes two specific items about their conversion, and one other in v. 10. First, they “turned toward God from the idols.” The word “turned” (*epistrepsate*) indicates repentance or a two-fold change in direction: not only “toward” (*pros*) God but also “from” the idols. This represents “the decisive break [in which] there could be no place for an idol alongside Christ” (Morris, 62-63). This expression “indicates the thoroughness of their conversion” (Wycliffe, 807).

Second, their turning also involved a positive pursuit: “to serve a living and genuine God.” The word “to serve” (*douleuein*) “means ‘to serve as a slave,’ and indicates the completeness of the Christian’s surrender to God” (Morris, 63). The verb “living” (*zonti*) means “as opposed to dead idols” and the word “genuine” (*alethino*) means “‘real’ as opposed to false in the sense of ‘counterfeit’” (Moffatt, 25); that is, “the imaginary gods of the heathen” (Gloag, 4).

D. Expectation of Glory (1:10)

V. 10: “and to keep on waiting for His son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus the One Who is rescuing us from the wrath that is coming”

The third item about their conversion is now addressed. The verb “to wait” (*anamenein*) occurs only here in the NT. It is in the present tense and indicates that which is linear, ongoing, or always in motion. Thayer suggests it carries the idea of “to await one whose coming is known or foreseen with the added notion of patience and trust” (40). Findlay says the prefix *ana* “implies *sustained* expectation” (30).

Reference to Jesus’ resurrection is a fact of which he himself was a personal witness. This fact was “the foundation stone for all his theology” (Robertson, 14). In his later letter to the Romans, he declared in 1:4 that it was by His resurrection from the dead that He was declared with power to be the Son of God.

The word “rescuing” (*hruomenon*) is used relatively often by Paul: Rom. 7:24; 11:26; 15:31; 2 Co. 1:10; Col. 1:13; 2 The. 3:2; 2 Tim. 3:11; 4:17, 18. Peter uses it twice (2 Pt. 2:7, 9). It is the same word used by Jesus in Mt. 6:13: “Deliver us from evil; as well as Mt. 27:43; Lk. 1:74; 11:4.

The word refers to “an act of *rescue*, by an exertion of power” (Stevens, 26). Here it is in the present tense and denotes the chronic, durative, linear, ongoing action of rescuing or delivering from something, and is currently or already in progress.

The object of such deliverance or rescue is pinpointed: “the wrath that is coming.” This is true from a two-fold standpoint:

(1) present wrath – Rom. 1:18: “For the wrath of God is presently being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Rescue or deliverance from this facet of wrath is

presently taking place by His intercession and mediation at the right hand of God.
(2) future wrath – The future day of judgment will also be a time when God’s wrath falls upon the disobedient and yet deliverance for God’s people (cp. 5:9 and Rom. 5:9. Stahlin’s (423) comments are imperative:

Wrath is an essential and inalienable trait in the biblical and NT view of God. When it is realized, as everywhere in the NT, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hb. 10:31), that He has power to save and to destroy (Jm. 4:12), and when He is feared because, beyond the death of the body, He has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell (Lk. 12:5; Mt. 10:28) awareness of God’s wrath is at the root.

Stahlin’s exhaustive treatment (422-447) of God’s wrath from multiple angles leaves no stone unturned.

In this section of scripture (1:2-10), Paul has pointed out four persuasive perspectives on the conversion of the Thessalonians: Exclamations of Gratitude (1:2-3) – Elected by God (1:4-6) – Examples of Godliness (1:7-9) – Expectations of Glory (1:10).

He now turns attention to five specific principles which are to regulate the conduct of the Christians at Thessalonica.

II CONDUCT AT THESSALONICA (2:1-16)

This section of scripture circulates around two key words: “for” (*gar* – vs. 1, 3, 5-6) and “but” (*alla* – vs. 2, 4, 7-12). The word “for” in v. 1 is completed in “not in vain” and will be contrasted (“but”) in v. 2 and completed in “the gospel.”

The word “for” in v. 3 is completed in “did not originate” and will be contrasted (“but”) in v. 4 and completed in “approved, entrusted, not pleasing men.”

The word “for” in v. 5 is completed in “no grandiose speaking” and will be paralleled in v. 11-12 and contrasted with “exhorting, encouraging, urging” --- it also extends to and is completed in “no greed” and will be paralleled in v. 10 and contrasted with “devoutly, uprightly, blamelessly” – it also extends to and is completed in “no glory” in v. 6 and will be paralleled in v. 7-9 and contrasted with “gentle, affectionate, labor.”

It is also to be noted that the word “speak” (v. 4) is paralleled by the word “impart” (v. 8).

A. Endurance for Gospel (2:1-2)

V. 1: “For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain:”

The word “vain” (*kene*) means “hollow, empty” (Robertson, 15).

V. 2: “but after having suffered and been shamefully mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we spoke boldly to you by the help of our God about the good news of God in the midst of much opposition”

The word “suffered” (*propathontes*) occurs here only in the NT.

The word “shamefully mistreated” (*hubrithentes*) means “to treat insolently” (Robertson, 15) or boldly rude, disregarding the feelings of others; arrogant or overbearing. Milligan (16) says: “more than the bodily suffering, it was the personal indignity that had been offered to him as a Roman citizen” – as seen in Acts 16:16-40 – a memory which “still rankled in his bosom” (Robertson, 15). However, the treatment at Philippi only filled Paul with increased boldness and courage in Thessalonica.

B. Entrusted with Gospel (2:3-4)

V. 3: “For our exhortation [is] not from error or impurity or deceit”

The word “exhortation” (*paraklesis*) is composed of two words: *para* – “beside” and *klesis* – “calling,” thus a ‘calling to one’s side’ for encouragement, comfort, assurance, and the uplift of partnership.

The word “error” (*planes*) indicates to lead astray. Paul and his associates were accused of “charges against the correctness of his message and the purity of his life” (Robertson, 16), thus leading people astray. The word may be translated “deceit, deception, delusion.” The word occurs only here in 1 Thessalonians but will occur again in 2 Thessalonians 2:11. Paul uses the word only two other times: Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:14.

The word “impurity” (*akatharoias*) means “defiling, without relationship to God” as in 1 Cor. 7:14. Paul uses this word only two other times in his writings: 2 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 5:5.

The word “deceit” (*dolo*) refers to “treachery.” Paul uses this word two other times in his writings: Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 12:16. It refers to not being “straight-forward” (Frame, 97).

By Paul’s use of these three terms, “he disavows evil intentions, respecting God, himself, and others” (Bengel, 477).

V. 4: “But just as we stand approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak, not as pleasers of men but God Who examines our hearts”

The word “stand approved” (*dedokimasmetha*) is in the perfect tense, denoting a state or condition of having been tested by God and approved by Him. “Paul here claims the call of God for his ministry and the seal of God’s blessing on his work and also for that of Silas and Timothy” (Robertson, 16).

The word “entrusted” (*pisteuthenai*) is the same verb ordinarily translated “believe,” and the noun “faith” (*pistis*). Its underlying significance means “to hand

over for safe keeping; to commit.”

The words “we” and “our” are in reference to Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. Rather than a trio who sings softly and sweetly to offer solace to people, for whatever benefit it may lead back to them, their speaking is solely and exclusively to please God Who is “the Infallible Judge of their sincerity” (Gloag, 27).

C. Expressions of Gospel (2:5-12)

There are noted in this section of scripture three behavioral expressions which are prohibited and then offset by positive alternatives:

(1) “No Grandiose Speaking”

V. 5a: “For we never came with grandiose speaking, as you know . . .”

The word “grandiose” (*kolakeias*) occurs only here in the NT. The word refers to “flattery.” Such flattery was used to please men (v. 4). It denotes “the subordination of one’s self to another for one’s own advantage” (Frame, 97). It is the self-saturated form of selfishness found in the word *eros*.

Offset:

[“But” extended from v. 7]: Vs. 11-12: “just as you know, how a father deals with each one of his children, exhorting you and encouraging and urging to walk in a manner worthy of the God Who is calling you into His kingdom and glory”

In addition to the mother-child metaphor (v. 7), Paul here uses the father-children metaphor. From the caregiving mode of the mother-child metaphor, the father-children mode is now highlighted since fathers in the ancient world were responsible for the cultural (norms, values, beliefs, etc.) development or socialization of their offspring.

Not surprisingly, “Paul of necessity took responsibility for resocializing his ‘children in the faith’ to the sometimes radically different demands of their new social existence as Christians” (Wanamaker, 106). This resocialization process involves three behavioral concepts: (1) “exhorting” (*parakalountes*) – This word carries the ideas of “to call to one’s side, summon; to entreat, beseech; to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort; to instruct, teach” (Thayer, 482-483). (2) “encouraging” (*paramouthoumenoi*) – This word carries the ideas of “to speak to, address whether by way of admonition and incentive, or to calm and console” (Thayer, 485). (3) “urging” (*marturomenoi*) – This word carries the idea of “to conjure, beseech as in God’s name, exhort solemnly” (Thayer, 392).

The word “walk” (*peripatein*) is “used by Paul exclusively in the metaphorical sense of *behaving* or *conducting* one’s self” (Vincent, 26). This “walk” is to be specifically geared toward a “manner of life” (*axios* – an adverb denoting a style

or course of life) that is God-oriented. Thayer says it means “suitably” (53). As Morris reminds one and all, “while it is well that we should appreciate the wonder of God’s lovingkindness to us, and the fact that His love does not grow less no matter how low we may fall, yet we should not waver in our grasp of the complementary truth that such a God must be served with all our powers” (85). After all, this God is always “calling” (*kalountos* – Present tense) and His children are to always be responding to His calls to His highest and best: “kingdom” (*Basileian*) – This refers to His reign or rule in the lives of His people through the Holy Spirit and “the economy of divine grace [which] is already present in the hearts of believers” (Airhart, 457). The word “glory” (*doxan*) encompasses the manifestation of God’s presence. Frame (105) states that this glory “is parallel with *basileia* and suggests not only the radiant splendor of God or of Christ but also the majesty of their perfection (cf. Ps. 96:6; Rom. 3:23).”

(2) “No Greed”

V. 5b: “neither with greediness, God [is] witness”

The word “greediness” (*pleonexias*) refers to a unceasing eagerness for more and more and more. It is rooted in “self-interest” (Robertson, 17) at the expense of others.

Paul so strongly revolts against this charge that he calls upon God Himself as his witness (cp. Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8). No higher Person or source of authority could be called upon to verify or validate the absolute truthfulness of his call and claim. So, since one’s motive is here under consideration, “Paul refers to God as one who sounds the depths of the heart, the inner life” (Frame, 96-97).

Offset:

[“But” extended from v. 7]: V. 10: “You and God are witnesses how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we came to you who have obedient-based faith”

Again, Paul reenforces the absence of greediness on his and his associates’ parts not only by his appeal to those in Thessalonica but also to God. Those who seek God and not greed are here characterized by three key terms: (1) “devoutly” (*hosios*) means “*holily* in divine things” (Bengel, 478); “*in a manner pleasing to God*” (BAG, 589); “pure” (Williams); this word occurs only here in the NT; (2) “uprightly” (*dikaios*) means “*justly* towards men” (Bengel, 478); “righteous” (Beck); Paul uses this word only one other place: 1 Cor. 15:3; (3) “blamelessly” (*amemetos*) means “as respects themselves” (Bengel, 478); “irreproachable motives” (Williams); Paul says that “no charge can be brought against him when he is examined by God” (Holmes, 67).

The verb commonly translated “believe” (*pisteuousin*) has the same meaning as the noun “faith” (*pistis*). Since the English word “believe” is often used in

the sense of *maybe or perhaps*, it seems best to translate “obedient-based faith,” as here.

(3) “No Glory”

V. 6: “nor seeking glory from men, either from you or from others”

This is Paul’s “repudiation of worldly ambition” (Milligan, 20). Cp. Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 4:2. Paul did not use the message of the gospel “as a foil to cover selfish purposes” (Frame, 98). To seek “glory” from men is to stand in opposition to God “as the proper source of glory” (Findlay, 40).

Offset:

“But”: V. 7-9:

V. 7: “– although as apostles of Christ, being able to assert such authority – But we were gentle among you, as a mother may care for her children”

The opening phrase – “although as apostles of Christ, being able to assert such authority” – is concessive or a relative yielding to an idea for consideration’s sake; it is like a parenthetical expression. That is, when all is said and done, they were qualified to exercise their authority as a matter of apostolic dignity, but chose not to do so.

Rather, the word “gentle” (*nepioi*) “is a very sweet word, usually applied chiefly to parents and children. It is opposed to flattery” (Bengel, 478). The metaphor of “children/mother” implies deep and “tender affection for the Thessalonians . . . the term “care” (*thalpe*) means “to keep warm, to cherish with tender love, to foster” (Robertson, 18). This word occurs in the NT only here and Eph. 5:29.

V. 8: “having a longing for you we were constantly well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you were such dearly loved ones by us”

The word “longing” (*omeiromenoi*) is “‘a term of endearment’ (Wohlenberg) derived from the language of the nursery” (Milligan, 22).

The word “well-pleased” (*eudokoumen*) is in the imperfect tense denoting incomplete and continuous action in past time. It means “to take delight or pleasure in.”

The infinitive “to impart” means “to share” and is another way of stating what he stated earlier in v. 4: “we speak.” To share not only the gospel but also “our own lives” is “a beautiful picture of the growth of Paul’s affection for them, a point which is further reenforced by the phrase “because you were so dearly loved by us.” The word for “loved” is not the word for brotherly love (*philos*) but godly, sacrificial love (*agapeto*).

V. 9: “For you remember brothers, our labor and hardship; working night and day in order to not be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God”

The word “remember” (*mnemoneuete*) conveys the idea “as though the facts mentioned might not be at once present to the minds of the readers and would need to be recalled” (Findlay, 44).

The word “labor” (*kopon* – 1:3; 3:5) is used by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:8; 15:58; 2 Cor. 6:5; 10:15; 11:23, 27; Gal. 6:17; 2 Thes. 3:8. It “signified *wearing toil*, labour carried to the limit of strength” (Findlay, 21).

The phrase “working night and day” (*nuktos kai hemeras ergazomenoi*) indicates the exertion and exhaustion he experienced in his “regular and frequent” (Moffatt, 28) expenditure of energy so as to avoid being a burden to them. Wanamaker (104) suggests the terms denote “their working night and day was done simultaneously with their preaching of the gospel. Paul, and presumably his colleagues, had little choice but to use the workshop as a place for communicating the gospel since so much of their time was spent there.”

In his 1984 paper, “Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul’s Preaching Activity,” Stanley K. Stowers supports this idea. He suggests that Paul did not engage in so-called street preaching or other forms of large gatherings of people but worked with individuals or small groups in the context of his regular workshop. They worked hard to support themselves. Paul “would not accept anything from those to whom he was preaching if it imposed a burden on them” (Morris, 82).

D. Effectualness of God’s Word (2:13)

V. 13: “And for this reason we are constantly thanking God that when you received the word of God’s message from us you welcomed it not as the word of men but for what it truly is the word of God, which also keeps on operating in you who have an obedient-based kind of faith”

The “reason” is that the Word of God was being effective in the lives of the Thessalonians, some of the details of which are spelled out in this verse, and as such placed Paul, Silvanus and Timothy in a constant mode of “thankfulness to God.” the three details of this thanksgiving are as follows:

(1) “you received the word of God’s message from us” – The word “received” (*paralambontes*) indicates an “outward reception by the mind” (Frame, 107). They were open-minded and listened attentively to what these three men were saying.

(2) “you welcomed it as the word of God” – The word “welcomed” (*edexasthe*) means “to welcome with approval” (Frame, 108) or internalized it for what it truly was. Rather than resisting the word of the gospel as just another message from among the many which were circulating by many messengers who posed

as genuine and divine teachers, you welcomed it with sincerity and genuineness as God's word. As Denney so powerfully expresses it: "It does not come to us soliciting our approval; submitting itself, as a system of ideas, to our scrutiny, and courting approbation. It speaks with authority. . . . Its decisive appeal is made to the conscience and the will; and to respond to it is to give up will and conscience to God" (84).

(3) "it keeps on operating in you who have an obedient-based kind of faith" - The word "operating" (*energeitai*) is where the English word "energy" originates, and in fact, is basically a transliteration [letter-for-letter copy] of the word. It means to "set in operation" (Robertson, 21), to keep something working, the doing or activity of some matter; to use or put something in motion. The present tense denotes an ongoing, chronic, durative, linear process. It is an energy which so exhibits itself in those who have "faith." A claim to faith which does not manifest itself in action is a false claim of a false faith. Thus, "this energy of the Word is released by faith! God himself is at work through His Word (cf. Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23-25)" (Airhart, 459).

The reason why this is an ongoing process is because "we cannot live today on the spiritual capital of yesterday" (Morris, 89).

E. Enemies of God (2:14-16)

V. 14: "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in union with Christ Jesus, that you also suffered the same mal-treatment at the hands of your fellow-countrymen, even as they themselves from the Jews"

The word "imitators" (*mimetai*) occurs here for the second time (1:6) in this letter. [Paul uses it elsewhere in 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Ep. 5:1.]

From a geographical standpoint, these "churches of God" were in Judea, but from a spiritual standpoint, they were "in union with Christ Jesus." Without or apart from this latter standpoint, these people in Judea would simply have been another mere social club.

The suffering here referenced indicates or substantiates "the fact that they were exposed to persecution, and bore it manfully, [and] proved that the gospel was a power in their lives, and also that they were in the legitimate succession of the churches. Such obstacles would as little thwart their course as they had thwarted that of Jesus or of his immediate followers" (Moffatt, 29).

Robertson suggests that this persecution "refers primarily to Gentiles who no doubt joined the Jews in Thessalonica who instigated the attacks on Paul" (21). Lightfoot (45) thinks the attack was "taken up by the native population, without whose cooperation it would have been powerless." This persecution was well-known throughout the region.

V. 15: "who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and banished us and are not pleasing to God but are hostile to all men"

Just as Peter laid the guilt on the godless Jews for the death of the Son of God (Acts 2:23), Paul here does the same. Cp. Mt. 23:29. They did the same to the OT prophets who confronted them with truths which turned them into killers. The word “banished” (*ekdioxanton*) means “to drive out, to chase out as if a wild beast” (Robertson, 21-22). This word occurs nowhere else in the NT. Just as Paul had done previously, these godless Jews thought they were pleasing God by their persecutions. The truth of the matter, however, is that they were actually displeasing to God, as well as hostile to all men by their efforts to prevent any and all of them from an obedient-based faith in God through Jesus, as the next verse specifies.

V. 16: “hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved, having filled up the cup of their sins, and wrath came upon them at last”

“In their outrageous perverseness, exclusiveness, and willful blindness, they not only refused Christ themselves, but tried to prevent the good news of salvation from reaching the Gentiles” (Airhart, 460). The word “hindering” (*koluonton*) indicates “the Jews’ ultimate antagonism toward non-Jews . . . their hindering of his mission to the Gentiles whom he sought to lead to salvation” (Wanamaker, 115).

The word “having filled up” (*anaplerosai* – aorist tense) indicates that the judgment of their sins is a settled fact, from which there is no escape, no leniency, no deliverance, and no relief. As Phillips phrases it: “they are completing the full tale of their sins, and the wrath of God is over their heads.” Beck translates, “God is angry with them forever.” TCNT translates, “God’s judgment has overtaken them at last!” Conybeare translates, “but the wrath [of God] has overtaken them to destroy them.” Rotherham translates, “but anger hath overtaken them at length.”

Airhart’s words are always significant: “Exclusiveness, narrow-mindedness, self-centeredness, bigotry, and legalism in religion were not and are not confined to the Jews. These verses warn of the high cost of religion without love” (461).

III CONCERN FOR THESSALONIANS (2:17-3:13)

A. Prevention of/by Satan (2:17-18)

V. 17: “And we, brothers, having been separated from you for a short time, in person not in heart, were extremely eager to see your face with great desire”

The word “separated” (*aporphanisthentes*) means to “make an orphan of someone” (BAG, 97) and occurs here only in the NT. So, in v. 7 he uses the metaphor of mother-care; in v. 11 the metaphor of father-children, and now changes the figure of speech to an orphan. The word “suggests the intimate

personal fellowship of the writer with his readers. The separation was like that between parents and children” (Vincent, 30). Plus, “the separation had occurred so recently [“a short time”] made our desire to see you the greater” (Stevens, 38). In actuality, despite the short separation, it consisted of physical absence but still cherished in heart. This “eager desire” (“to run after, to yearn after” – Robertson, 23) to see them again in person was one of magnanimous proportions.” That the Thessalonians were never off his mind did little to ease the anguish” (Holmes, 95).

V. 18: “Wherefore we wanted to come to you, indeed, I Paul, again and again, and Satan prevented us”

The intensity and depth of desire to go to the Thessalonians consisted of frequent but failed attempts. This failure to translate desires into deliverance of those desires is here attributed to Satan. The verb “prevented” (*enekophen*) means “that Satan ‘cut in on us,’ i.e., stopped us” (Lenski, 276).. “Satan always seeks to make impassable the roads of service for Christ” (Hobbs, 273). “It is Satan’s work to throw obstacles into the Christian’s way – and it is our work to surmount them” (Barclay, 193).

Although Satan was “defeated in the cross (Col. 2:14-15) and doomed to be completely vanquished in the end (1 Cor. 15:24-25), he nonetheless in the meantime continues to attack God’s people” (Holmes, 95). We are left in the dark as to precisely how these preventive efforts of Satan occurred. Speculations abound elsewhere (Bailey, 281-282; Robertson, 24; Hobbs, 273) – but not here.

B. Pride in Saints (2:19-20)

V. 19: “For who is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing – is it not even you – before our Lord Jesus at His coming?”

The word *tis* is better translated “who” rather than “what” since it is the Christians themselves at Thessalonica who are in view.

The word “hope” (*elpis*) indicates that despite the trials and afflictions endured as soldiers of the cross, they “would be kept by divine power so as to meet before the Master and enjoy His acceptance and welcome” (Eadie, 96). The word denotes Paul’s confidence and assurance in this regard.

The word “joy” (*chara*) indicates what he experienced “in them as the trophies of his toil and warfare” (Eadie, 96).

The words “crown of rejoicing” (*stephanos kaucheseos*) indicates that just as the victor in human races may take pride or boast in his particular crown of victory, so “the apostle might rejoice in the salvation of his converts through God’s grace and by his preaching” (Eadie, 97).

The word “crown” (*stephanos*) occurs here only in this letter. Paul also uses it in 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; and 2 Tim. 4:8. It also occurs in Jms. 1:12; 1 Pt.

5:4; and Rev. 2:10; 3:11; 4: 4, 10, 6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14. It is used for “the victor’s crown in some contest and especially for the athlete’s crown of victory in the games. Paul uses it here. The only prize in life that he really valued was to see his converts living well” (Barclay, 193) – and winding up well in the end.

The expression “before our Lord Jesus at His coming” refers to His second advent to earth. The word “coming” (*parousia*) is used four times in this letter: 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23 – and three times in 2 Thessalonians: 2:1, 8, 9. It refers to “the return of Jesus” (Wanamaker, 124).

V. 20: “For you are our glory and our joy”

The word “glory” (*doxa*) means “praise or honor . . . the Thessalonians are the cause of much rejoicing” – “in their final salvation, in their rescue from temptation and suffering and death, and in their spiritual change which has ripened into glory” (Eadie, 98).

The word “joy” is repeated from v. 19: “the words are merely confirmatory, and added from the fulness of the apostle’s emotions” (Gloag, 80).

C. Persecution for Saints (3:1-8)

V. 1: “When we could endure no longer, we decided to be left behind alone in Athens”

Paul’s concern over whether or not the new converts in Thessalonica were enduring the trying times favorably had created some form of stress and anxiety for him. His own endurance had reached a point where something had to be done to relieve it. So, Paul and Silvanus decided to stay in Athens and make arrangements to find out about the Christians in Thessalonica, as v. 2 explains.

V. 2: “and we sent Timothy, our brother and fellow-worker of God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith”

Paul’s appraisal of Timothy is most commendable. He was a Christian “brother” and “fellow-worker” in the mission of the gospel. His purpose was two-fold: (1) The word “strengthen” (*sterixai*) means “to establish, to fix firmly, confirm, to continue resolutely” (Hobbs, 274). It carries with it “the idea of buttressing” (Airhart, 465). (2) The word “encourage” (*parakalesai*) means “called alongside to help; to urge, to appeal to, console, comfort, cheer up.”

“Timothy’s visit, then, had been for the purpose of buttressing their faith. He came to encourage them with a view to the strengthening of their faith” (Morris, 101).

V. 3: “that no one be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know

we are destined for this”

The aim behind the two-fold purpose in v. 2 is “that no one be disturbed by these afflictions.” The word “disturbed” (*sainesthai*) means “to upset, to move, to beguile; to wag the tail, to flatter” (Robertson, 25). By the strengthening of their faith, they would be able to stand firm, not be moved, not dislodged in their discipleship by the various forms of “afflictions” (*thlipseis*) which are common accompaniments against the Christian faith: “we are destined for this.” “By virtue of being a Christian one must expect both persecution and beguiling efforts” (Hobbs, 274). However, such oppositions must be resisted by faith or commitment to Christ regardless of these afflictions. Dependence upon and constant communication with the Holy Spirit provides the necessary strength for such resistance.

V. 4: “For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we are destined to be afflicted, just as you also know [and] it came to pass”

The reason why his readers should not be “moved, upset, beguiled” by the afflictions is because such afflictions are simply normal. They are “not some strange thing which had befallen them” (Gloag, 55). When Paul was with them earlier, he had repeatedly informed them that this was the case. So, they knew it and were experiencing it.

These “afflictions” consisted of such things as “socio-religious dislocation, conflict (including persecution), and/or ostracization – if they joined the Christian movement. This is because Christians ‘are destined’ (*keimai* in 3:3b, cf. Luke 2:34; Phil. 1:16) for such things (Acts 14:22). That is, the ‘trials’ that the Thessalonians experienced are not a matter of chance, fate, karma, or bad luck, nor are they unique to the Thessalonians. Rather, they are a consequence of God’s election and part of the common experience of Christians everywhere . . . a sign that believers really are on God’s side. Paul’s point is clear: Properly understood, the experience of ‘trials’ should strengthen, not weaken, one’s commitment to Jesus (Holmes, 98-99).

V. 5: “For this reason, when I could not endure any longer, I sent to know about your faith, lest somehow the tempter tempted you and our labor may be in vain”

Paul’s lack of assurance that the Thessalonians adequately understood this motivated him to send Timothy to evaluate the matter. He actually feared their misunderstanding of the matter and that their faith had not been sufficient to withstand “the tempter.” This is Satan and his wicked workings “through wicked men” (Bengel, 480); i.e., “Satan working through the persecutors in

Thessalonica. As Satan hindered Paul (2:18), so he sought to destroy his work” (Hobbs, 275). If such wound up being the case, their “labor may be in vain” – useless, “*to no purpose*” (Vincent, 33).

V. 6: “And now that Timothy has come to us from you and delivered good news about your faith and love and that you have good memories of us, longing to see us just as we also [are longing to see] you”

Fortunately, however, Paul’s anxious concern was relieved by Timothy’s return to him and Silvanus with good news about the situation with his readers. Their faith and love were strong. In fact, “as the following words more fully specify, [they had] a faithful and affectionate remembrance” (Ellicott, 42) of them. They were “longing” (*epipothountes* – “desiring”) to see the trio again. It was a “‘mutual longing’ that pleased Paul” (Robertson, 26).

V. 7: “for this reason we have been encouraged, brothers, about you in all our distress and affliction through your faith”

Encouragement, therefore, was the result of Timothy’s return with positive news about the “brothers” and their remaining steadfast in “faith,” despite the “choking [*anagke*] and crushing trouble [*thlpsei*]” (Robertson, 26).

V. 8: “for now we live since we stand firm in the Lord”

“Now” – since having received such positive news – Paul says, “we live,” i.e., “we” [Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and his readers] have a renewed life because “Satan has not prevailed” (Stevens, 42), and “since” (1st class conditional word which states something as true) “we stand firm in the Lord.”

The word “stand firm” (*stekete*) means “*to stand firm, to persist, persevere, to persevere in godliness and rectitude in one’s fellowship with the Lord*” (Thayer, 588). Paul will use this same word in 2 Thessalonians 2:15. [He also uses it in Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 5:1; Phil. 1:27; 4:1.]

His deep concern for their “faith” had already been referenced in 2:2, 5. “He expresses his relief now that they have not wavered in maintaining a right attitude to God” (Morris, 106).

As Hobbs (275) notes: afflictions are “made lighter to know that others in similar circumstances are standing by the faith and are remembering other Christians in love and fellowship.”

D. Prayer for Saints (3:9-10)

V. 9: “for what gratitude are we able to return to God for all the joy with which we rejoice before God because of you”

Vs. 9-10 constitute what is likely a rhetorical question – and perhaps even an exclamation.

Instead of claiming any personal credit for the good news he received from Timothy, he reflects all credit to God in a spirit of “gratitude” (*eucharistian*) which is “grace” (*charis*)-based. That is, “their steadfastness in the faith was owing to God’s grace, [so] thanks was to be rendered to God on their behalf” (Gloag, 55).

V. 10: “as we are praying more earnestly night and day to see your face and to mend what [is or may be] lacking in your faith?”

Even though Paul experienced the lessening or moderation of the strain he was undergoing prior to hearing the good news about them from Timothy, his praying to see them again was intensified. The word “more earnestly” (*huperekperissou*) – which occurs only here and 5:13 in the NT – indicating his prayers were “overflowing all bounds” (Robertson, 26) or limitations. The KJV translates “exceedingly” – “deepest earnestness” (Williams) – “most ardently” (Beck).

His praying was also oriented “to mend” (*katartisai*) any “lacking” (*husteremata*) in their faith. The infinitive “to mend” means to repair or “to fit a thing for its full and proper use” (Wycliffe, 814); “primarily, *to adjust, fit together*” (Vincent, 33). While nothing specific is here noted, if there was any gap or deficiency in their faith, it was his concern to identify and intervene in that issue, element, or facet of their faith. Stevens, however, suggests that “what these deficiencies of faith were, appears, in part at least, farther on in the letter. Their faith was deficient in knowledge in many points. On one of these Paul proceeds to give instruction in the latter part of the next chapter” (43).

However, the word “lacking” may indicate that the trio’s work in Thessalonica was incomplete, especially in light of the brief time they had formerly spent there (i.e., probably four weeks), and not necessarily refer to some problem. As Lenski notes: “Even if all the members had had the benefit of all the work of these four weeks, the time was too short to give them all the instruction they needed and themselves knew that they needed. They longed to have the missionaries return for a much longer stay just as the missionaries longed to make this stay (v. 6)” (294).

E. Possibilities for Saints (3:11-13)

V. 11: “Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus make straight our pathway to you”

Whether this a continuation of prayer or wishful desires of possibilities for his readers, these words turn “the reader’s thought to God as the Supreme Disposer of events” (Stevens, 43). The word “Himself” is emphatic. As Ellicott (46) notes: the word is designed “to place in contrast the human agent with his earnest but foiled efforts (2:18) and God who, if he willed, could instantly and surely accom-

plish all.”

V. 12: “and with wishes [that] the Lord increase and provide in abundance love for one another and for all, even as we also for you”

The word “love” (*agape*) is the strong and superlative type of love, as compared to brotherly love, as important as the latter word is. But even *agape* Wycliffe notes:

has the capacity for growing endlessly. It increases in intensity toward an individual and expands to embrace others. Christian love is first directed toward believers (**one toward another**) and then reaches out like God’s love **toward all men**. This love can only be produced by the Spirit of God (Col. 1:8; Gal. 5:22). More than sentiment or warm feeling, Christian love is the selfless desire for the total welfare of others. (814)

Paul then closes that this is the same type love which he and Silvanus and Timothy has for them.

V. 13: “to establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones, Amen.”

The aim of this love is now specified.

The infinitive “to establish” (*sterixai*) means “to make firm, strengthen, support, secure” (BAG, 775); “to make stable, place firmly, fix” (Thayer, 588).

The word “hearts” (*kardias*) indicates “the renewal and unification of the whole personality” (Clarke, 292).

The word “blameless” (*amemptous*) occurs only four other times in the NT: Lk. 1:6; Phil. 2:13; 3:6; Heb. 8:7. Here it occurs in connection with “holiness” (*hagiosune*) and signifies “separation from sin and our devotion to God” (Lenski, 299). Neil (73) adds these words of cautionary concern: “A man may be morally blameless without being holy, and a man may be ecclesiastically ‘holy’ without being motivated by love. But to be blameless in holiness **before God** demands the inwardness of consecrated service – the ‘heart’ must be pure as well as the outward behaviour, and the motive must be love to God and to one’s neighbor.”

Salvation consists of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Regeneration refers to the new birth or the beginning of salvation: being delivered from the penalty of sin. Sanctification refers to the ongoing process of being delivered from the power or dominion of sin. Glorification refers to the final aspect of being delivered from the presence of sin. This final aspect consists of the full redemption (Eph. 1:14) of the body and translation to heaven. This final aspect is what is under consideration here: the Lord’s return!

The phrase “with all His holy ones” refers to “all the redeemed being associated

with the Lord at his coming (cf. 4:16 f.)” (Hobbs, 277). The NT teaches that both angels and “the departed saints will be associated with the Lord when He returns. There seems no reason why Paul should be intending to eliminate one or the other at this point. It is best to understand the ‘holy ones’ as all those bright beings who will make up His train, be they angels or saints who have gone before” (Allis, 115). Oswald Allis offers several interpretations about this passage (185-187). As Barclay suggests: “At this time [Paul’s] mind was full of thoughts of the Second Coming of Christ when men would stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The shock of that day will be for those who meet him as a terrible stranger” (197).

IV CALL OF THESSALONIANS (4:1-12)

A. Christian Example (4:1-2)

V. 1: “From now on, then, brothers, we are asking you and urging [you] in the Lord Jesus that just as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are [already] living, that you may continue [so] living more than ever”

The word “from now on” (*loipon*) is translated “furthermore” (KJV). The NASV translates “finally.” “Furthermore is a good translation because by this term Paul is attaching “in a somewhat loose way, even in the midst of an Epistle, a new subject to that which he has been discussing” (Vincent, 34). The latter, “finally,” however, is an equally acceptable or accurate translation but may be a bit misleading if one expects a near conclusion.

The expressions “asking and urging” are words of encouragement and exhortation to the “brothers,” and “given in friendly and kindly spirit. Cordial reception of the appeal is assumed. No new request is being made; only an exhortation to a yet fuller realization of that to which they have given themselves” (Bailey, 294). So, despite Paul’s affirmations about the appropriate and admirable lifestyle by his fellow-Christians, they are to continue that lifestyle and to do so “more than ever.” Did they possibly think that they had reached the ideal life in which they were “unblamable in holiness before our God” (3:13)? Paul indicates that that would be a delusion or false belief. There is always room for additional growth in grace; additional challenges to confront and conquer; more territory to tread in both inreach and outreach as far as the Christian faith is concerned. There are surely more “moral goals to be attained” (Clarke, 293).

V. 2: “For you know what instructions we gave to you by means of the Lord Jesus”

The word “instructions” (*paraggelias*) refers to *commands* or *charges* or *directives*; “precepts, guidelines” (Holmes, 124) It occurs only four other times in

the NT: Ac. 5:28; 16:24; 1 Tim. 1:5, 18. This has nothing to do with the ten commandments but with the instructions given to them during his first visit. Indeed, here Paul reflects on his earlier visit with them in which he gave them authoritative directions about the Christian life. They were not his opinions but came directly from and in concert with “the Lord Jesus.” He will repeat them again in vs. 3-8.

As Denny (31f) points out, “every function of the Christian life is determined” by the coordinative concerns of the Father and Son. He disclaims any personal ideas and is “ascribing the highest possible authority” (Morris, 120) to God alone in “the Lord Jesus.”

B. Consecration (4:3-8)

V. 3: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification or holiness, you [are] to avoid sexual immorality”

The “will of God” means “the desire and purpose of God” (Bailey, 294). Thayer states that the word “sanctification” (*hagiasmos*) indicates “*consecration, purification* wrought by the Holy Spirit [and] is opposed to lust” (6). The word “to avoid” (*apechesthai*) is in the present tense indicating the need for constant and conscious efforts in the “must-to-avoid” syndrome. It means to “*keep completely separate from*” (Wycliffe, 816).

The word “sexual immorality” (*porneias*) occurs only here in this letter but Paul uses it elsewhere: Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5. Hauch and Schulz (579-595) provide an exhaustive look at the many uses of this word in ***the Non-Jewish World** [in relation to extra-marital intercourse (cultic prostitution, secular intercourse outside marriage, the sex ethics of stoicism)], in ***the Old Testament** [fornication in national life in the OT, cultic prostitution in the OT], in ***Later Judaism**, in ***the NT** [the proclamation of Jesus, Acts, Paul, Hebrews and James, Revelation], and in ***the post-apostolic Fathers**. This is a must-read for the broad-stroked ramifications of this term in the Bible.

It is inserted because of the sexual impurities of the pagan religions in the area. Indeed, Neil (74) notes:

The fact is that one of the most difficult hurdles that any pagan convert had to clear was the Christian attitude to sex. He had been brought up in a world where polygamy, concubinage, homosexuality, and promiscuity were accepted as a matter of course. . . . Many of the religious cults were frankly sexual in character, with phallic rites and sacramental fornication as part of their worship.

V. 4: “each of you knowing to exercise self-control [by] taking a wife for himself

in holiness and honor”

The word “knowing” (*eidenai*) “not only denotes knowledge, but power of mind. Both are certainly required for matrimonial chastity” (Bengel, 482). The expression “to exercise self-control” is clearly a directive “to restrain the sexual impulse within the limits of purity and honor, each having his *own* wife” (Bengel, 482).

The word “holiness” (*hagiasmo*) means “in full consecration of body and spirit, in inward cleansing of depraved passions” (Airhart, 476).

The word “honor” (*time*) means “the resulting reverence for the body, rather than in prostitution of its faculties and appetites” (Ibid).

V. 5: “not in lustful passions even as the Gentiles who do not know God”

The contrasts with “holiness and honor” are set forth in verses 5-6: (1) “not in lustful passions” (*pathei epithumias*) – This word “is by no means limited to sexual lust. It is used as including all kinds of worldly desires, as Gal. 4:16, 24; 1 Jn. 2:17. In Rom. 7:7, especially of covetousness” (Vincent, 36).

The Gentiles are those who are “strangers to the revealed and holy law of God” (Airhart, 476). They regard the body as “an instrument for self-gratification” (Phillips).

V. 6: “to not sin and cheat in this matter against his brother, because the Lord [is the] avenger regarding all such things”

(2) The words “to not sin” (*to me hyperbainein*) may also be translated “that no man go beyond” and refers to “*overpassing limits*. Also of *overtaking*, *passing by*, *surpassing*, as in wickedness or cruelty. It is an expansion of the preceding thought. Pursue your business as holy men: do no overreach or defraud. It is the *overstepping* of the line between mine and thine” (Vincent, 36-37).

“The wronged **brother** may be deceived, and the society in which such offences occur may fail to condemn them or may even condone the, but the judgment of God upon all impurity is sure and terrible” (Airhart, 477).

The word “avenger” (*ekdikos*) refers to God as the One Who punishes. It indicates that all impurity, especially of the sexual nature, “is a grave sin and the judgment of God is upon it. Impurity in the final analysis is despisal of God” (Clarke, 294). God will wink no eye at it now or later. This word occurs only one other time in the NT: Rom. 13:4.

V. 7: “For God did not call us on the basis of immorality but in the sphere of holiness”

God’s “call” is to consecration and discipleship. It is a “call” which operates “in the sphere of holiness” or separation to God

The word “on the basis of” (*epi*) indicates that God’s ultimate intention, aim, goal, concern, direction is not in conjunction with immorality or uncleanness. The word “holiness” (*hagiasmo*) may also be translated “sanctification” but has the root meaning of “holiness” or “separation from sinful pursuits to the pursuit of God.”

God’s call to holiness or separation from the continual practice of sin is a contrast to the accepted practices of people who do not know or follow God. After all, God calls has never been based on the pursuit of immorality but “holiness of heart and life” (Airhart, 478). The word “holiness” is the same word in vs. 3 and 4.

V. 8: “For that very reason then the one rejecting [this truth] is not rejecting man but the God Who is giving His Holy Spirit to us”

The word translated “For that very reason” (*toigaroun*) is a rare combination of three words: *toi – gar – oun*. It occurs only one other time in the NT: Heb. 12:1.

The word “rejecting” (*atheton*) means “setteth aside” (Vincent, 37). Thus, repair. After all, the truth does not originate in man but in God Who uses man to communicate His message. This God, in fact, is so generous and caring that He “is giving His Holy Spirit to us.” This additional phrase is superlative. It is “a strong reinforcement of holiness, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit was given them for the express purpose of producing holiness within them” (Gloag, 75).

“The message of the foregoing eight verses is peculiarly needed in this hour. To rescue our homes and our nation from the ruin which threatens, the Church must lift high the standard of moral purity to be found only through the sanctifying grace of God in Christ” (Airhart, 479).

C. Commendation (4:9-11)

V. 9: “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need [for us] to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”

The word “brotherly love” (*philadelphias*) “always means love of the brother in Christ” (Frame, 158). Indeed, “only those taught of God keep on loving one another, love neighbours and even enemies as Jesus taught (Matt. 5:44)” (Robertson, 30).

The words “taught by God” means that “God imbues us with love by regeneration; therefore the word *taught* has a *Catachresis* [i.e., irregular application of a word], that it may be opposed to *writing*. *To love* The Divine doctrine centres in love” (Bengel, 483).

V. 10: “For you are practicing this [loving one another] toward all the brothers in all Macedonia. And we urge you, brothers, to continue to provide [this love] in abundance”

Paul acknowledges that his readers are already practicing this love. But Paul wants them to “make progress in brotherly love – that it increase in purity, in warmth, and in extent” (Gloag, 75). After all, “Christian love should never become complacent, as though a certain level of love were sufficient to please God” (Wanamaker, 162). Robertson calls this “delicate praise” (30).

V. 11: “and to keep pursuing your ambitious aim to live a quiet life and to attend to your own affairs and to work with your own hands, just as we gave instruction to you”

This exhortation to increase or expand the dynamic dimensions of love is followed by a threefold roadmap to chart love’s course: (1) “to live a quiet life” --- (2) to attend to your own affairs” --- (3) to work with your own hands.”

(1) “to live a quiet life” – That is to live in peace and avoid the restlessness and unworthy ambitions of worldly interests and pursuits which are not in accord with God’s will.

(2) “to attend to your own affairs“ - This restless meddlesomeness here condemned Paul alludes to again in II Thess. 3:11 in plainer terms. It is amazing how much wisdom people have about other people’s affairs and so little interest in their own” (Robertson, 30).

(3) “to work with your own hands” – Gloag suggests this expression may indicate that the church at Thessalonica was “chiefly composed of the labouring classes” (75). Whether or not that was the case, it is the case that “God has given each of us a definite assignment, out of which ought to come a definite sense of destiny” and duty (Clarke, 300). Denney’s comments (161-162) will likely insult many people:

If we cannot be holy at our work, it is not worth taking any trouble to be holy at other times. . . . Perhaps some of us crave leisure, that we may be more free for spiritual work; and think that if we had more time at our disposal, we should be able to render many services to Christ and His cause which are out of our power at the present. But that is extremely doubtful. If experience proves anything, it proves that nothing is worse for most people than to have nothing to do but be religious. . . . The daily life of toil . . . does not rob us of the Christian life; it really puts it within our reach.

As Bailey so poignantly reminds us: “The Thessalonian Christians are enjoined to correct all these faults in order to give the public a more favorable

impression of the general character and spirit of the group. They should become examples of good, wholesome, and worthy living” (300).

D. Consequence (4:12)

V. 12: “in order that you may continue to live honestly toward those outside the realm of faith and may not have need for anything”

The word “honestly” (*euschemonos*) occurs also in Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 14:40. It is of primary importance “lest men be able to say that Christianity leads to sloth and poverty” (Bengel, 483). So, here Paul is concerned with winning the respect of outsiders; in the next verse he cautions against grieving like outsiders. The word “for anything” (*medenos*) refers to those who were “depending upon others for their support, which some, in view of the immediately expected parousia, were disposed to do, neglecting their own business” (Vincent, 38). The expression “those outside the realm of faith” are those in the world of non-belief, no faith, no commitment to Christ, and not included in the body of Christ, the church – “the company of the committed” or “the incendiary fellowship” (Trueblood).

Robertson states that “people outside the churches have a right to watch the conduct of professing Christians in business, domestic life, social life, politics” (31).

Barclay’s words (234) are as potentially offensive as those of Denney: “When we Christians prove that our Christianity makes us better workmen, truer friends, kinder men and women, then and only then are we really preaching. The important thing is not words but deeds, not oratory but life.”

Indeed, as Airhart underscores: “The humblest Christian has opportunity to reflect honor upon the cause of Christ through the consistent and faithful performance of his duties, and nothing can really compensate for the discredit suffered through failure to do so” (481).

The expression, “may not have need for anything” indicates that “idlers are not to depend upon the charity of others. Brotherly love will make people thoughtful of the needs of the poor or unfortunate, but the Christian must not be a parasite or a sponger. A certain reasonable independence in such matters is a Christian virtue” (Airhart, 481).

V COMING OF CHRIST FOR THESSALONIANS (4:13-5:11)

A. Clarification about Return of Christ (4:13-18)

V. 13: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are sleeping, in order that you not be grieved, as those not having hope”

It seems that Timothy had brought some news from the Thessalonian Christians

to Paul concerning some concerns, perhaps even questions, they had about what happens to some Christians who had apparently died since he last saw them. Apparently he had not given them an oral or written account about the matter when he was first with them. So, he now responds with perspectives on the subject. He did not want them to be either misinformed or without knowledge concerning those who had died.

The term “sleeping” (*koimomenon*) is a euphemism or mild expression for the more gruesome term “death.” It “does not mean soul-sleeping or unconscious existence until the resurrection” (Hobbs, 280). Plus, it is in the present tense and implies a continuing occurrence and nothing to be regarded with surprise or shock. Frame (167), therefore, calls such Christians “the sleepers.” After all, despite the non-Christian view of death as a complete and irrevocable travesty or tragedy, for the Christian death is not that “tyrant who brings all worthwhile existence to a horribly final end. Death has been overcome by the risen Lord, and that has transformed the whole situation for those who are in Him” (Morris, 137). The purpose of offering this information to those at Thessalonica was to clarify the condition of those who had lost “the sleepers.” Grief itself is not prohibited since it is part and parcel of the adjustment process when friends and/or relatives fall asleep. Therefore, the directive has a qualifying element to it: “do not grieve *as those not having hope*.” “There is always sadness at parting. But for the Christian it is one of loneliness, not of despair” (Hobbs, 280). For non-Christians, losing someone through physical death represents hopelessness. But for Christians, the loss is full of hope and assurance. He now explains in more detail just why this is so.

V. 14: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus”

The word (*ei*) commonly translated “if” is accurate. But it is a first class condition word and assumes something to be true. Therefore, it is here translated “since.” That is, “since” they held the same *faith* (noun form of the verb *believe*) together with Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, that Jesus’ death and resurrection was factual and full of significance, the words “even so” denotes that they will be resurrected also, and God will bring them with Jesus when He returns. This, of course, means “that they [“the sleepers”] are with him now, not lying in a lonely tomb” (Hobbs, 281).

To say that “Jesus died” means that He “took the full cup of death that he might triumph over it (Heb. 2:14-15)” (Wycliffe, 819). He triumphed over it in His resurrection and thereby guarantees or assures our own (1:10).

The expressions “with Him” and “in Jesus” indicate “Jesus as the mediating link between His people’s sleep and their resurrection at the hands of God” (Milligan, 57; Robertson, 31).

V. 15: “For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are

are living, remaining to the coming of the Lord may not in any wise precede those who have fallen asleep”

The expression “by the word of the Lord” may indicate some saying of Jesus, such as Mt. 24:31, which is referenced. Moffatt (37) says it may be “a prophetic revelation vouchsafed to Paul himself, or to Silvanus.” Other speculations abound – but not here. We simply cannot arrive at a definite conclusion on the matter, but that does not erase or mitigate any truth within it or from it.

There was apparently, on the part of the Thessalonian Christians, some degree of anxiety or fear that those who were living at the time of “the coming of the Lord” would temporarily leave behind those “sleepers.” Paul is reacting against such an idea. In fact, “those surviving to that day will have no advantage over the faithful departed, and Paul uses an emphatic expression, ‘in no wise,’ to underline his point” (Morris, 142). Any thought otherwise is “an empty one” (Hobbs, 281). He now proceeds to comment on the “order” of experience at that time.

V. 16: “Because the Lord Himself with a shout, with a voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, shall descend from heaven and the dead in Christ themselves shall rise first”

The noun “a shout” (*keleusmati*) is a word of *command*, indicating that “Christ will come as a Conqueror” (Robertson, 32). Thayer notes it is like “the cry of a commander to his soldiers in combat, by a charioteer to his horses, or by a ship’s master to his oarsmen” (Thayer, 343). Airhart calls it “a loud, authoritative summons, exciting and stimulant” (485). This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. [However, the verb form of this noun is *kaleuo* and occurs:

Mt. 8:18; 14:9, 19, 23; 15:35; 18:25; 27:58, 64; Lk. 18:40; Ac. 4:15; 5:34; 8:38; 12:19; 19:22; 21:33, 34; 22:24, 30; 23:3, 10, 35; 24:8; 25:6, 17, 21, 23; 27:43.]

The only “archangel” mentioned in the NT is Michael (Jude 9) and may be the one named here (Moffatt, 38). As Wanamaker notes (174), “angels were frequently connected with the end of the age (2 Thes. 1:7; Mk. 8:38; Mt. 24:31; Rev. 15:1), though the association of an archangel’s *voice* with the end is an unparalleled image.” The likely meaning of the archangel’s “voice” is that he “will add his voice to the call which wakes the dead . . . a voice that will be uttered [as] a very great voice” (Morris, 144)

“The trumpet of God” pictures or portrays “the grandeur of the Lord’s return in triumph and great glory” (Hobbs, 281). Milligan calls it “*a trumpet dedicated to God’s service*” (60).

So, “these three phrases convey the splendor of the scene and the Lord’s majestic authority” (Wycliffe, 819-820).

J. B. Phillips translates: “One word of command, one shout from the Archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and God in person will come down from heaven!”

In order to relieve the anxiety of the Thessalonians about the departed fellow-believers not sharing in the Parousia [“coming”], Paul now asserts that those “dead in Christ” will be the very first ones to rise from the dead when He comes. Rather than missing out on anything, “they definitely will share in the Parousia along with the living” (Hobbs, 281). Thus, the anxiety and uneasiness about them are here clearly aborted.

V. 17: “Then we the living ones, the remaining ones shall be carried away with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, thus we all shall be with the Lord”

Now Paul asserts that the coming will be a *joint-adventure* with “the living ones, the remaining ones.” Although the dead in Christ will rise first, their being “carried away” (*arpagesometha*) will be a simultaneous meeting of the Lord in the air.

The ultimate, ever-longed for” desire will then be realized: “we all shall be with the Lord.” As Paul indicates in 5:10, as well as 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Col. 3:4, this was his primary and constant longing, even his “chief hope” (Robertson, 33).

V. 18: “Therefore, keep on encouraging one another with these words”

The words from Paul were not designed or “intended to give a systematic picture of the last things, but were geared to the problem at hand” (Wycliffe, 818). It is essential to note that these words were not just from Paul to them for encouragement and comfort. Rather, they themselves were commanded (imperative) to “keep on using” (present tense) his words as tools or channels or vehicles whereby they provided positive encouragement between and among themselves as they continuously interacted with “one another.” It was a matter of mutual or reciprocal encouragement.

B. Call for Readiness (5:1-11)

V. 1: “Now concerning the chronological and crisis moments, brothers, you have no need [for me] to write [anything about them] to you,”

Paul’s call for readiness is not concerned with establishing incontrovertible details about any general period of time or any particular moment in time in which the day of the Lord will occur.

V. 2: “for you yourselves accurately know that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night”

The word “for” (*gar*) specifies the reason why Paul is not writing anything in that regard – “you yourselves accurately know” that neither I nor you know or can know any such specifications. Just like “a thief in the night,” who does not

announce or send preparatory signals of his coming, so this “day” is known only to God the Father. However, it is known that this will be “a day of terrible alternatives: the sinner’s doomsday, the saint’s day of glory” (Airhart, 488).

V. 3: “While they are saying, ‘peace and safety,’ then unexpected destruction is coming upon them, like a pregnant woman having birth-pains, and they shall by no means escape [the destruction]”

The ongoing words of “peace and safety” indicate a sense of false security, self-preoccupation, and self-preservation, all of which will backfire and rather issue into “unexpected destruction” or the utter and final separation from God (cp. 2 Thess. 1:9). It will be as sudden as the birth-pains of a pregnant woman. There will be no other alternatives than either doom for non-Christians or deliverance for Christians from sin’s very presence into the fascinating glory of and with Christ.

V. 4: “But you, brothers, are not in darkness, that the day, like a thief, may surprise you”

The word “darkness” indicates ignorance of the truths Paul is unfolding, and such ignorance does not reside in the “brothers.” Thus, that day will not overtake them with “surprise” – whenever it is!

V. 5: “For all of you are sons of light and sons of day”

After all, they are “sons of light and of day,” meaning that they are living in awareness of the not-known features of the day of the Lord but are resting in its eventual happening and doing so with watchfulness, wonder, and trust.

V. 6: “So then let us not sleep as the rest but let us keep alert and keep sensible”

So, in keeping with the sober awareness and anticipation of that day, Christians are to avoid “sleep” (i.e., indifference), dullness or apathy (i.e., “keeping alert”), and irrational, insensible expectations (i.e., “keeping sensible”). In other words, sons of light and sons of day are to be “calm and collected in spirit, temperate, dispassionate circumspect” (Thayer, 425).

V. 7: “For those sleeping, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night”

Sleeping and drunkenness are commonly associated with “night” and things which involve some degree of indifference and lack of alertness to life’s normal affairs.

V. 8: “And since we belong to [the] day, let us pursue sensibility since we put on the breastplate of faith and love and [for] a helmet, [the] hope/assurance of salvation”

The expression “sons of day” (v. 5) and those who “belong to the day” here are synonymous expressions, and indicate that Christians “can have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness” (Morris, 158) and their insensible ramifications. The word “sensible” (*nephomen*) means “general temperance, with the avoidance of all kinds of excess” (Morris, 158).

Under the idea of Christian warfare and the need for armor, Paul mentions, once again, what he first mentioned in 1:3: “faith, love, and hope.”

These are defensive items and serve to protect against “surprise” (v. 4). Faith is commitment to God, regardless of the nature and number of surprise attacks, while love is “the principle which regulates total conduct” (Airhart, 491). As Moffatt notes (40), “Faith and love are a unity; where the one goes the other follows.”

The word “hope” (*elpis*) denotes “assurance, confidence” of salvation. Thus, these three elements are absolutely necessary in light of “the darkness and uncertainty of the last time” (Vincent, 46).

V. 9: “For God did not appoint us for wrath but obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”

Christians are not destined to receive “wrath” on “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5), but “obtaining salvation” (*peripoiesin soterias*). The word “obtaining” means the “possession,” as in 2 Thess. 2:14. This “possession of salvation” is made possible “through our Lord Jesus Christ” and none other (Acts 4:12). It here indicates “deliverance from wrath,” and in the next verse takes on another facet of meaning: “fellowship with Him.”

V. 10: “the One having died for us, in order that whether we may be alert or asleep we may live [in fellowship] together with Him”

The other purposeful design of salvation, made possible through His death [and resurrection, of course], is that whether we may be alert (alive) or asleep (dead), we may experience the culmination of salvation: to live “in one company” (Gloag, 104) with Him. Indeed, those who have experienced regeneration and sanctification will now experience glorification.

V. 11: “Therefore, keep on encouraging one another and each one building up the other, just as you are doing”

The conclusion, in light of the previous verses, is an imperative in the present tense: “keeping on encouraging one another and each one building up the other”

as you are, in fact, already doing!

The words “each one the other” (*heis ton hena*) constitute a unique way of expressing some truth in a way different from ordinary words. They depict another way of saying “one another” and indicate “*reciprocal*” interactions (Moule, 120). Indeed, Robertson (692) notes that instead of saying “one another” again, these words explain what the former “one another” means. Lenski (351) agrees and then adds another twist: “Individual is to build up individual; [but] this goes beyond reciprocity, for he who has shall [also] supply him who yet lacks.”

VI CONDITIONS FOR HARMONY AT THESSALONICA (5:12-22)

In verses 13-26, there are seventeen imperatives. It appears that these commands or conditions are Paul’s pivotal pointers for harmony among the congregation at Thessalonica.

A. Proper Recognition of Leaders (5:12-13)

V. 12: “And we ask you, brothers, to maintain respect for those laboring among you, exercising authority over you in the Lord, and admonishing you”

The word “respect” (*eidēnai*) means “to have regard and understanding for” (Hobbs, 284). The primary idea in the word is to “either ‘acknowledge’ or ‘recognize’” (Holmes, 178) them.

The word “laboring” (*kopiontas*) means “to the point of weariness and exhaustion.” It “denotes the energy and practical interest of these people” (Moffatt, 41). The word “exercising authority” (*proistamenous*) means “‘over them or stood before them as leaders’” (Hobbs, 284). It carries the idea of “to lead, protect, care for” (Holmes, 178).

The word “admonishing” (*nouthetountas*) means “to put sense into them” (Hobbs, 284). “An instinct of rebellion against authority is not confined to any one class, so Paul appeals for respect and generous appreciation towards local leaders” (Moffatt, 41).

V. 13: “and to esteem them very highly indeed in love because of their work. Keep on practicing living in peace among yourselves”

To esteem means “regard them with a very special love for ‘their works’ sake” and instead of introducing divisions and disorder by any insubordination or carping” (Moffatt, 41). This is to be done “in love,” and love “implies loyalty to its object” (Hobbs, 284). The expression to practice “living in peace” may indicate some degree of tension of conflict between the congregation and the leaders. But since this imperative verb is in the present tense (“to keep on practicing living in peace”), it may also indicate that there was no tension.

B. Pointed Remarks for Living (5:14-22)

V. 14: “And we encourage you, brothers, warn the disordered ones, encourage the fainthearted ones, *hold up* the weak ones, *hold out* patience toward all”

The words of Stott (122) are alarmingly and always true. The three groups of troubled people here noted are not restricted to Thessalonica. In fact, “the idle, the anxious, and the weak were the ‘problem children’ of the church family plagued respectively with problems of understanding, faith, and conduct. Every church has them.”

The word “warn” is the same word “admonish” in v. 12. There, however, it was used in a positive manner, here it is used as “a note of disapproval” (Holmes, 180).

The word “disordered ones” (*tous ataktous*) were the idle ones or “those who had broken ranks” (Hobbs, 284). They had become “undisciplined, irresponsible, disorderly” (Holmes, 180). This is the only occurrence of this adjective in the NT. It “characterizes a man as one who sets himself outside the necessary and given order. . . . It does not in the first instance lay emphasis on sloth but on an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work. . . . an undisciplined life in the secular sphere contradicts the direction under which the Christian stands” (Delling, 47-48).

[The verb form of this word {*atakte*} occurs only in 2 Thess. 3:7; and the adverb form of the word {*ataktos*} occurs only in 2 Thess. 3:6, 11.]

The “fainthearted ones” (*tous oligopsuchous*) were those on the verge of quitting work because of the immediate expectation of the Lord’s return, or had lost heart and were discouraged because of the death of fellow-believers, or were making poor adjustments from their former pagan practices and behaviors. They were likely worried, fearful, full of anxiety, sad, apathetic, and lack of confidence. The “weak ones” (*asthenon*) were those struggling with matters of immorality. They may be the ones about whom 5:1-11 are referencing.

The words “patience toward all” (*makrothumeite pros pantas*) denotes “forbearing” (BAG, 489) or exercising “control” when things seem out of control.

V. 15: “See that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but constantly seek good for another and to all”

Christians are to abdicate the right to revenge because that right belongs exclusively to God. The “good” is, of course, the opposite of “evil” – whatever and whenever it may need to be more precisely identified.

As Moffatt notes (41), “the special circumstances which called for forbearance (ver. 14) were likely to develop a disposition to retaliate upon those who displayed an ungenerous and insubordinate spirit, including their fellow-countrymen, 2:14.” The words “to all” (*eis pantas*) are the exact words he used in 3:12.

V. 16: “rejoice always”

This “implies a spirit of unfailing gratitude to God, instead of any suspicious or rebellious attitude” (Moffatt, 42). Gordon Fee notes that “the emphasis on joy is not so much on the experience of joy, but the active expression of it” (54). This expression cannot be muffled or nullified because God is actively working in, for, and among His people.

V. 17: “pray constantly”

This speaks of perseverance in prayer, not spasmodic or intermittent or periodical praying. The translation of this command into reality does not happen by happen-chance. “The way to constant joy in the midst of persecution is constant prayer . . . especially supplication. That they can thus pray as they ought is possible because of the indwelling Christ” (Frame, 201-202). This is a “habit of prayer, turning your thoughts into acts by committing them with the idea of the redeeming God” (Moffatt, 42) and to that redeeming God.

V. 18: “give thanks in all things, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”

Spiritual mathematics is before us: “constant joy” + “constant prayer = constant thankfulness” - “to God at every turn of life” (Frame, 202). Indeed, it is true that Moffatt’s comments strike a sharp note: “This glad acceptance of life’s rain and sunshine alike as from the hand of God, Jesus not only exemplified but also enabled all who keep in touch with him to realise. The basis of it is the Christian revelation and experience; apart from the living Lord it is neither conceivable nor practical” (42).

V. 19: “Do not practice quenching the Spirit”

To quench the Spirit is “to put out his fire” (Hobbs, 284). This may be done by abusing the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of both the individual, as well as the congregation at large. It may be done by pitting so-called Pentecostal Christians against so-called non-Pentecostal Christians as far as the manifestation of certain spiritual gifts is concerned (tongues, prophecy, etc.). “Today, as then, there are two extremes about spiritual gifts (cold indifference or wild excess). It is not hard to put out the fire of spiritual fervor and power” (Robertson, 37). Plus, since the Holy Spirit is “the inspirer of prayer” (Vincent, 49), failure to “pray constantly” (v. 17) may be another way to quench the Spirit. He may also be quenched by failure to give constant thankfulness to God (v. 18).

V. 20: “Do not view prophetic utterances with contempt”

Prophetic utterances are the speaking forth of scripture or the forth-telling rather than the fore-telling of interpretations of scripture.

The word “contempt” (*exoutheneite*) means to “count as nothing” (Airhart, 498). Airhart continues: “Since the spurious would be mixed with the real, it would be easy to hold all prophesying in contempt. But God chooses to speak to all men through human utterance, and however humble and unskilled the channel, the listener is to look for God’s message to himself” (498).

V. 21: “And test the genuineness of all things. *Hold fast* to the good.”

The testing of the genuineness of all things said or told is to prevent the teaching and the practice of what is false or in contrast with the truth of scripture. Thus, the testing of any prophecy or other teachings “is its agreement with the apostolic preaching and teaching about Jesus; any prophecy that does not agree with the apostolic proclamation is immediately suspect (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). Scripture is the standard or norm by which prophecy is to be tested, not the other way around. This is the test of content” (Holmes, 189).

However, “in applying the standard of spiritual discernment, it must sift, not for the mere pleasure of rejecting the erroneous but with the object of retaining what is genuine” (Moffatt, 42).

“The good “ refers to “the utterance of the Spirit for upbuilding and love” (Frame, 207). There can be no truly spiritual “good” apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, “hold fast,” “hold on to” (Williams), “cling to” (Beck) the Holy Spirit and the truthfulness which He delivers.

V. 22: “Keep yourselves free from every form of evil”

This verse states negatively what the former verse stated positively. That is, “through this twofold process [of “holding fast to the good” and “abstaining from every appearance of evil”] the growth of the Christian character goes on, assimilating the good, rejecting the evil. The energy of the second process will be directly proportioned to that of the first” (Stevens, 69). The word “form” or “appearance” (KJV) includes various kinds or species of evil. “This, in view of the pagan life about them, was no easy requirement” (Bailey, 314). But it was and is a requirement, nevertheless.

Conclusion (5:23-28)

V. 23: “Now may the God of peace Himself set you apart completely [for Himself] and may your spirit and soul and body be safely guarded [as] complete, [and] blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

The God of peace is the God Who not only gives peace to others but does so because that is what He Himself is by His very nature.

The word “peace” also is used “with a special allusion to the breaches of harmony and charity produced by vice (cf. connection of 3:12, 13 and 4:3f), indolence, impatience of authority or of defects in one another (v. 13 f), retaliation (v. 15), and differences of opinions” (Moffatt, 42-43).

The word “set apart” (*hagiasai*) means to set “apart from profane things and for divine service” (Hobbs, 485).

The words “spirit and soul and body” mean “man’s whole being, whether its immortal, its personal, or its bodily side” (Milligan, 107); “the whole/entire man” (Morris, 181).

The word “safely guarded” (*teretheie*) means “preserved, kept, kept under guard, reserved, maintained, kept firm.”

The word “” (*holokleron*) means “complete in all its parts, no deficiency in any part” (Robertson, 39) – “an undivided whole” (Frame, 211).

The word “blamelessly” (*amemptos*) first appeared in 2:10. It is an adverb revealing that “Paul clearly wants his converts to be found complete and without fault in every aspect of their existence at the time of the public manifestation of their Lord” (Wanamaker, 206).

V. 24: “Faithful is the One Who is calling you, and He shall do this”

That which God calls us to be is what He Himself is: “faithful.” That is, God keeps His word and is dependable and trustworthy. God has given many promises in the gospel records and scripture elsewhere. “He will faithfully do all that needs to be done to preserve [His promises to] those who fully commit themselves to him” (Bailey, 315).

V. 25: “Brothers, keep on praying for us”

The next to last occurrence of the word “brothers” in this letter is appropriately positioned with his prayer request. “Paul invites intercessory prayer, which is perhaps the noblest form of prayer” (Clarke, 315) for himself, Silvanus, and Timothy.

“Not only are the [three] missionaries interested in their converts, remembering them constantly in prayer, but they assume the interest of the Thessalonian brethren in them” (Bailey, 315).

V. 26: “Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss”

The word “salute” (*aspasasthe*) carries no formal or legal tone. It is simply the normal word used in greeting people.

The word “kiss” simply indicated “mutual affection” (Moffatt, 43).

This holy “kiss” is mentioned in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12, and a “kiss of love” in 1 Pt. 5:14. In the early church, this custom was similar to today’s practice of shaking hands. But in course of time, this exchanging of the “kiss” between males and females led to some undesirable consequences. Therefore, “the early church councils passed a number of regulations governing the circumstances under which the kiss should

be exchanged” (Morris, 184).

V. 27: “I solemnly charge you before the Lord [that] this letter be read to all the brothers”

The word “I solemnly charge” (*enorkizo*) “is a form of putting one on oath” (Hobbs, 285). Plus, the switch from “we/us” to “I” is Paul’s way by which he “reinforces the command” (Wycliffe, 825). and “before the Lord” strengthens even further the solemnity of his charge.

The words “read to all” indicates that Paul is laying “stress upon the proper use of his epistle, as being meant not for a special set, but for the entire brotherhood” (43).

V. 28: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you”

Paul now closes with the same word with which he opened: “grace” (1:1). Stevens (71) wisely declares that “all his heart goes forth in this largess of benediction, which sums up in itself all that is best and highest in human hope and aspiration.” Denney’s comments (264-265) are also most appropriately here echoed:

Whatever God has to say to us – and in all the New Testament letters there are things that search the heart and make it quake – begins and ends with grace. . . . All that God has been to man in Jesus Christ is summed up in it: all His gentleness and beauty, all His tenderness and patience, all the holy passion of His love, is gathered up in grace. What more could one soul wish for another than that the grace of the Lord Jesus should be with it?

2 Thessalonians

Introduction

In 146 B.C., Macedonia was organized as a Roman province and Thessalonica became the capital. This significant seaport city, originally known as Therma, was initially the capital of only one of the divisions of Macedonia, eventually becoming the capital of the entire province. It was re-named Thessalonica in 315 B.C. by Cassander, the de facto ruler of southern Greece from 317-297. He chose the name in honor of his wife, Thessalonike. She was the daughter of Philip of Macedon and the sister of Alexander the Great.

Its geographical location played perhaps the major factor in its cosmopolitan or widely spread influence. The main Roman road (Via Egnatia) formed the east-west land bridge between Rome and Byzantium. It connected the city to the eastern provinces and impacted its wealth and other commercial enterprises. The population of Thessalonica in the first century was about 200,000. Paul came here on his second missionary journey. Age-old cults, philosophies, political and civic affairs, religious gods and goddesses, and divine devotion to the Roman emperor were all alive and well in this city. Especially in light of this divine devotion, “in such an environment, to preach Christianity was tantamount to treason” (Holmes, 19).

All that we know about the founding of the church in the city of Thessalonica is found in Acts 17:1-10. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were partners in founding the church here. They had come from Philippi after experiencing persecution and other ill treatments. After arriving in the city, they proclaimed the gospel and again experienced fierce opposition. They remained here for several weeks, however, and expended much energy and formed intense relations with the local Christians.

This city is mentioned in the NT: Acts 17:1, 11, 13; 27:2; Phi. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:10. Today it is known as Thessaloniki or Saloniki. It is the second largest city in Greece and the capital of the geographic region of Macedonia. Indeed, as Bishop Meletius of Antioch (360-381) once said, “As long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and fortunate” (Lightfoot, 255). It remains so to this day.

Authorship

As indicated above, the three had partnered in founding the church. It would only be normal, then, that all three collaborated in writing both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Unless one holds the divine dictation perspective on scripture writing, it is relatively easy to see these three shared ideas with one another and pointed out perspectives from their own viewpoints. Even though Paul himself may have formulated their discussions or interactions into the final form within these letters, such shared input should not be viewed as threatening in any way regarding the inspiration of the writings.

Furthermore, “the plural ‘we,’ meaning Paul and companions, is found more often in these Thessalonian letters than in any others written by him” (Bailey, 246). It is interesting that in light of these potentially semi-co-authored writings, Paul does not isolate or identify himself as either “apostle” or “servant” of Jesus Christ. What would account for this absence?

2 Corinthians 1:19 indicates that Silvanus was a companion of Paul in the preaching of

the gospel in Corinth. Silvanus was the Roman name for the Greek name Silas. He is called Silas in Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 34, 40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5. He is called Silvanus in 2 Cor. 1:19, 1 The. 1:1; 2 The. 1:1; 1 Pt. 5:12. So, Silas/Silvanus was somewhat connected with Paul in his ministries in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. As a partner with Paul in ministry, did he not ever interact with Paul about ideas in scripture writing formulations?

Timothy, on the other hand, was a constant companion of Paul. Paul had met him in Lystra and was recommended by those in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-4). He took Mark's place after Mark departed with Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts. 15:39). He was also connected with Paul in the Corinthian correspondences (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1). He was also with Paul when he wrote letters to the Romans (16:21), Colossians (1:1), Philemon (v. 1), and Philippians (1:1). In light of all these connections, did Timothy never share his perspectives and experiences or interact with Paul in scripture writing formulations?

Chronological Sequence

There has been considerable debate over the years concerning which of these two letters was written first (cp. Bruce, 37-45; Hobbs, 261; Holmes, 27-28; Morris, 37-41; Guthrie, 575-578; Kummel, 263-264; Moffatt, 10-11). Since there has never been a definitive conclusion in this regard, this commentary will follow the traditional order for at least three reasons: (1) The problems in 1 Thessalonians seem to have deepened in 2 Thessalonians; (2) 2 Thessalonians 2:15 indicates that Paul had previously written to the church and may likely be referring to 1 Thessalonians; (3) the personal references in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 are more appropriate in a first letter.

Reasons for Writing

On his first trip to Thessalonica, Paul had been warmly welcomed by the majority of Christians. However, the fruitfulness of his brief time there had generated some degree of suspiciousness and envy on the part of a number of others – both Christians and non-Christians. In order to either prevent or escape persecution, Paul was forced to leave the city. He went approximately fifty miles south westward to Berea and then to Athens and Corinth.

However, this departure from Thessalonica was most difficult, despite its necessity. As Moffatt (4-5) reminds us:

From no church did Paul tear himself with such evident reluctance. His anxiety to get back to it was not simply due to the feeling that he must go on with the Macedonian mission, if at all possible, but to his deep affection for the local community. The Macedonian churches may almost be termed Paul's favorites. None troubled him less. None came so near to his heart. At Thessalonica the exemplary character of the Christians, their rapid growth, their exceptional opportunities, and their widespread reputation, moved him to a pardonable pride.

For an impressive portrayal of Macedonia and Thessalonica, see Renan's *St. Paul* (pp. 109-123), and Dobschutz's *Christian Life in the Primitive Church* (pp. 81-98).

So, with understandably deep, genuine concern over the welfare of his friends in Thessalonica, he sent his associate Timothy to learn of their condition. His other associate Silas or Silvanus had been sent to Philippi on a similar mission. Upon hearing about their situation in Thessalonica, Paul decided to write them a letter.

First Thessalonians was apparently written for eight primary reasons: (1) to share his delight and gratitude for their faithfulness to the gospel; (2) to encourage them in the face of false charges or accusations against Paul and his associates; (3) to offer encouragement in the face of persecutions, the need for endurance, and to not grow faithhearted; (4) to remind them of the importance of purity in life; (5) to beware of religious frauds and scam artists; (6) to clarify information about the death of fellow-believers; (7) to provide comments about the return of Jesus; and (8) to make behavioral recommendations between fellow-believers.

Second Thessalonians was apparently written for three primary reasons: (1) to provide additional encouragement with continuing problems of persecution (perhaps more intense or widespread); (2) to offset misunderstandings about the return of Jesus as far as the "lack of industry" (Wycliffe, 803) by some was concerned; (3) to make additional behavioral recommendations for some in the congregation.

There is almost universal agreement among biblical scholars that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were the first Christian writings (Plummer, xiii; Bengel, 474). Indeed, as Goodspeed remarks, "With these two short letters Paul began Christian literature" (6).

2 Thessalonians
Scripture in a Structural Format

Salutation (1:1-2)

- I ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SERVICE (1:3-12)
 - A. Persecution (1:3-5)
 - B. Punishment (1:6-10)
 - C. Prayer (1:11-12)
- II EVILS PRECEDING SECOND COMING (2:1-12)
 - A. Deceit (2:1-3a)
 - B. Deification (2:3b-9)
 - C. Deception (2:10-12)
- III ELECTED FOR SALVATION (2:13-3:15)
 - A. Celebration (2:13-14)
 - B. Command (2:15)
 - C. Comfort (2:16-17)
 - D. Concerns (3:1-2)
 - E. Confidence (3:3-5)
 - F. Caution/Counsel (3:6-15)
- IV EXPRESSIONS OF SECURITY (3:16-18)
 - A. Conditionless Affirmation (3:16)
 - B. Custom of Authenticity (3:17)
 - C. Comprehensiveness of Aspiration (3:18)

2 Thessalonians

A Commentary

Salutation (1:1-2)

1:1: “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

See 1 Thess. 1:1 for comments on this verse. The only difference is the inclusion of the word “our” here. This is added to stress the Fatherhood of God to the Christians at Thessalonica.

1:2: “ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

See 1 Thess. 1:2 for comments on this verse. The only difference is the addition of words after the word “peace”: “from God the/our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This addition “makes plain that the Father and Christ are one source. It is remarkable that even at this early date the Son is placed side by side with the Father as the fount of divine grace, without any need of comment.” (Bicknell, 66).

I ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SERVICE (1:3-12)

A. Persecution (1:3-5)

It is of superlative significance that the encouragement for service and notations of gratitude in this section of scripture occur in the context of *persecution* and not because of their being in an Ivory Theological Tower, shielded from the realities of life. Paul here lays out several features of thanksgiving in behalf of those who were the persecuted ones.

1:3: “We ought to keep on giving thanks to God always for you, brothers, in as much as it is proper [to do so], because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of each one of you for one another is increasing”

The word “we ought” (*opheilomen*) occurs also in 2:13. It is not in the imperative mood but, nevertheless, conveys a strong “sense of obligation” (Robertson, 41) “to keep on giving thanks to God always” (present tense). As Bicknell (68) so wisely deposits, “thanksgiving is a tonic, because it lifts the mind away from human imperfection to the wisdom and love of God.” So, the five reasons for this continuous overflowing of gratitude are spelled out concretely in verses 3-5: (1) “it is proper” (*axion*) – Paul uses this word in Rom. 1:32; 8:18; 1 Cor. 16:4; 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 5:18; 6:1. It means “*worthy, fit*” (BAG, 77); “*having weight, value, worth as much; befitting, congruous*” (Thayer, 52); “*worthwhile*” (Robertson, 41); Frame (221) suggests that this pitch was needed for “the faint-

hearted” who were facing insecurities about their relationship to God and just how genuine they actually were; Jowett (155) indicates it is “an emphatic repetition of the preceding, ‘we ought to give thanks,’ [but] *axion* expressing a higher degree of the same notion as *opheilomen* – not merely an obligation, but a noble and worthy thing, a freewill offering as well as a duty”; (2) “your faith is growing abundantly” - The word “growing abundantly” (*huperauxanei*) occurs here only in the NT. BAG (847) translates it meaning as “*grow wonderfully*.” Thayer (640) suggests “*to increase beyond measure*.” As Delling notes (518), “the faith which grows is an active one.” (3) “love of each one of you for one another is increasing” – Is this a fulfillment of Paul’s prayer in 1 Thess. 3:12? Several (Robertson, 42; Airhart, 505) think so. Others (Wanamaker, 217; and Gloag, 1), however, note that 3:12 includes “all,” while this passage is only for “each one of you,” thus, restricting it to fellow-Christians. Whatever the correct interpretation may be, together with the growing of their faith, the “picture is of luxuriant growth, like that of a tree or plant” (Airhart, 505). Gloag (1) states that “faith and love contain in themselves the whole of the Christian life; faith is its commencement, its source; love is not only its outcome, its spiritual action, but its completion; the climax of the Christian life is to be made perfect in love. . . . [an increase] in intensity.” As Morris notes, “love was a bond uniting the whole church” (195).

1:4: “with the result that we ourselves [are] to keep on boasting about you among the churches of God concerning your perseverance and faith in the midst of your persecutions and afflictions which you are willingly enduring”

The (4) reason for the overflowing gratitude is that their “perseverance and faith” led to the trio’s “boasting about [them] you among the churches of God.” The word “boasting” (*egkauchasthai*) occurs here only in the NT. However, in 1 Thes. 2:19, he uses a form of this word as he referred to them as his crown of “rejoicing” (*kaucheseos*) – which any eye can see such similarity in the mere spelling of the words. So, there is a “rejoiceful boasting” in play here, as the trio spread word about them to other “churches of God” beyond Thessalonica itself.

Also, the word “perseverance” (*hupomones*) is the exact same word used in 1 Thes. 1:3 in connection with “endurance/perseverance of hope.” So, while the word itself (“hope” – *elpis*) is not included here, the idea or concept with it surely is.

The word “faith” (*pisteos*) was mentioned by Paul in 1 Thes. 3:10 as something which the three wanted to “complete what is lacking,” which see for comments.

Thus, “the faith-love-hope” of 1:3 is also “the faith-love-hope” in verses 3-4 of this letter.

Again, the remarkable digestion of these three elements is that they were oc-

curing in the midst of “persecutions” (*diogmois*) and “afflictions” (*thlipseusin*), the latter term translated by Williams as “crushing sorrows.” It is also the same word Paul used in 1 Thes. 1:6; 3:3, 7. He uses the term again in v. 6 of this chapter.

The last word in this verse is a present tense verb “enduring” (*anecheste*) which indicates that the “tribulations and afflictions” were chronic, ongoing, durative, linear, or being repeated over and over again. Therefore, “Paul boasted of their continuing endurance” (Morris, 197).

1:5: “[which is] evidence of the righteous judgment of God to be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, and concerning which you are suffering”

The (5) reason for the overflowing gratitude is that their perseverance or endurance and faith are “*clear evidence [endeigma]* or a *plain indication* that God’s **righteous judgment** will be favorable in their case (cf. 11 Cor. 4:16 ff. and Phil. 1:28” (Wycliffe, 829-830).

As Frame (226) regards it: “Since the object of boasting specified in v. 4 is not suffering, but the constancy of their endurance and faith in the midst of persecution, *endeigma* is not to be taken with the idea of suffering along . . . but with the idea of endurance and faith in spite of persecutions.” In other words, “the fact that they had been able to endure it so courageously, with unshaken steadfastness and faith, is evidence that God is working in them. It is a righteous thing with God to provide for His people all things needful for them. The plain fact is that He has done this for the Thessalonians” (Morris, 198).

B. Punishment (1:6-10)

Paul now turns from the several features of thanksgiving in behalf of the persecuted ones to spelling out several features or components of God’s “righteous judgment” on the persecuting ones. That is, verses 3-5 focused on the present sufferings of the people of God; verses 6-10 focus on the future sufferings of the enemies of God and “will be a manifestation of God’s justice” (Jowett, 157).

1:6: “Since it is just with God to repay with affliction those who are afflicting you”

The word “since” (*eiper*) is a first class conditional word which assumes reality or the certainty of this judgment of God. “It is not arbitrary. It does not change men, but shows them to be what they have made themselves” (Bicknell, 69). The word “just” (*dikaion*) means God’s “justice” or “righteous” nature and activities.

The word “repay” (*antapodounai*) means recompense, to return; it is “the law of compensation in kind” (Bengel, 490). That is, what has been delivered to others will now be returned in like manner – yet even worse!

This repayment will be explained more fully in verses 7-9. Relief, however, is briefly noted in v. 7.

1:7: “and relief to you who are being afflicted with us at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels”

The word “relief” (*anesin*) indicates “rest, relaxation, not in this world, but in the next; freedom from earthly affliction, release from sorrow, suffering, pain; relaxation from toil, ease from noise and turmoil, the quiet haven of peace after being tossed about in the tempestuous ocean” of life (Gloag, 2).

The word “unveiling” (*apokalupsei*) refers to disclosure, a setting forth, “the unveiling of what already exists” (Bicknell, 69).

According to Mt. 16:27; 24:31; Jude 14, Christ will come to judgment in attendance with His holy angels. These angels are “the ministers of his power, to manifest it and to be its agents” (Stevens, 77).

The following verses elaborate on the nature of this judgment:

1:8: “in a flame of fire, inflicting punishment to those who do not know God and to those who are not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus”

The words are echoes of Ps. 79:6; 104:4; Isa. 66:15; Jer. 10:25.

The verb “inflicting” (*didontos*) is descriptive of a most horrible reality: “punishment” (*ekdikesis*) implies “vengeance” (KJV, Williams, Beck); “retribution” (NASB); “punishment” (Taylor).

Paul uses this word elsewhere: Rom. 12:19; 2 Cor. 7:11. It also occurs in Lk. 18:7, 8; 21:22; Ac. 7:24; Heb. 10:30; 1 Pt. 2:14.

The other noun form of this word (*ekdikos*) in 1 Thes. 4:6 indicates that “God is the Avenger, the Administrator of moral justice” (Airhart, 508).

The punishment is exhaustive or comprehensive: the Gentiles are “those who do not know God,” even “though Jews are also guilty of wilful ignorance of God (Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14)” (Robertson, 44); and the Jews are “those who are not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (Denney, 295).

This matter of “not obeying the gospel is to refuse it the faith which it would create” (Lenski, 388).

1:9: “who shall suffer the penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glorious manifestation of His strength”

The “punishment” or “penalty” is now more precisely defined: “eternal destruction” indicates “the severity of the punishment awaiting the enemies of God without seeking to specify its precise content” (Wanamaker, 229). However, the additional phrase, “from the presence of the Lord” is the exact opposite of salvation as being “with the Lord always” (1 Thes. 4:17), and this within itself may be regarded as its content. As Vincent states: “It is severance”

(62) from Him and that without remedy. [For an extended discussion of “eternal destruction, see Vincent, 58-62.]

The additional feature of this penalty is separation “from the glorious manifestation of His strength.” . This “glory” is “the glory which overpowers men at his appearing” (Jowett, 158). Indeed, “the manifestation of Christ’s coming shall itself bring everlasting ruin upon his foes” (Stevens, 79).

Paul will mention “glory” again, in a positive way, in verses 10 and 12 in its verbal forms (*endoxasthenai* and *endoxasthe* respectively). There he provides some insight into “the blessed experience in store for the Thessalonians” (Wanamaker, 229).

1:10: “when on that day He may come to be glorified among His saints and to be marvelled at among all who believe, for our testimony to you has been believed”

Airhart provides these positive perspectives on these words: “At His coming, Christ will be the Center and Focal Point of all. His glory, His attributes, His blessedness will be seen in the persons of the saints, who are also described as **them that believe**. Their characters, like mirrors, will reflect or reproduce His glory” (510). Barclay’s term for this reflection of His glory is “the reciprocal glory” (244); this captures the idea of Christ being glorified in His followers, who like the moon reflects the glory of the sun, they too reflect the One Whose glory only is Christ Himself (John 13:31; 14:13; 17:1, 4, 10, 22; 1 Thes. 2:20). This indicates, most accurately, “the mutuality of Christ’s relationship to believers” (Airhart, 510).

The word “marvelled” (*thaumasthenai*) is a word Paul uses in only one other place in his writings: Gal. 1:6, though in a negative way. It is used here in a positive way and denotes that the glory of Christ, as seen by those who “believed” “will be so far beyond their expectations that they will be caught up in wonder and admiration, lost in amazement – a breath-taking wonder” (Hobbs, 288-289) which will never cease.

C. Prayer (1:11-12)

1:11: “to this end also we ourselves are praying for you always that our God may count you worthy of His calling and He may fill every desire for goodness and the work of faith in power”

The words “to this end” (*eis to*) refer to the future feature of salvation noted in v. 10.

In his first letter (5:17), he commanded them to be ceaseless in praying. He now reveals that he himself is ceaseless in his praying for them (present tense verb and the word “always” [*pantote*]). His chronic prayers in their behalf revolve around three primary concerns: (1) “that God may count you worthy

of His calling” – The verb “God may count you worthy” (*axiose*) indicates that God wants their “whole life to be in harmony with” (Milligan, 93) His “calling” to salvation. There is to be no discrepancy between His “calling” and their “conduct.” This word *axiose* occurs 6 other times in the NT: Lk. 7:7; Ac. 15:38; 28:22; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 3:3; 10:29. (2) “He may fill every desire for goodness” – that is, “in their broader development of moral character . . . every aspiration and desire after moral excellence” (Moffatt, 47). Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) Who makes such goodness possible. This embraces God’s “good pleasure, delight and [the believers’] contentment, satisfaction” (Vincent, 58). (3) “the work of faith in power” – that is, all the works, ministries, and activities which are “inspired by faith” (Frame, 240) and are also the product of the Spirit’s “power” or “ability” to so produce. Without His aid, such would be impossible.

1:12: “in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ”

The purpose of the prayer is now stated: the glorification of Jesus and His own in accordance with grace.

When the three primary concerns or elements of prayer in v. 11 are activated or are in motion, the name or character of Jesus as Lord is glorified, that is, made manifest or obvious. But it also leads to or results in the glorification of His followers (“and you in Him”) – as His followers; because they are His followers. Apart from Him, and the activation of the noted elements in v. 11, no such recognition will or could occur.

After all, the closing phrase states that all three elements are due to, rests upon, made possible by, springs from, and resides exclusively in divine “grace” – a theme unfolded throughout 1 Thessalonians (1:1; 5:28) and 2 Thessalonians (1:2, 12; 2:16; 3:18).

II EVILS PRECEDING SECOND COMING (2:1-12)

D. Deceit (2:1-3a)

2:1: “Now we earnestly urge you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together around Him”

The word “earnestly urge” (*erotomen*) is an affectionate (“brothers”) and passionate appeal to their sensibilities about the “coming” (*parousia*) of the Lord” he raised in 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23 in regard to the “second advent” (Gloag, 23).

The word “gathering together” (*episunagoges*) – occurs only one other time in the NT: Heb. 10:25 – here refers to “the community’s gathering together with the Lord at the time of his coming. . . The next verse gives some indication of the

situation that led Paul to take up the theme of the parousia and the assembling of the community to be with the Lord” (Wanamaker, 238).

2:2: “that you not be quickly shaken from your rational understanding or be startled either by a spirit or a message or a letter, as if from us, that the day of the Lord is here”

The word “quickly” (*tacheos*) indicates “the quality of the action: hastily, precipitately” (Morris, 215). It implies “a speedy disturbance, a startled movement” (Findlay, 164).

The word “shaken” (*saleuthenai*) means “to agitate, to totter like a reed” (Robertson, 47). This “points to a sudden action, of literal shaking, [like] the motion produced by wind and wave, and especially violent motion, like a ship driven from its moorings, of people who lack a secure anchorage, and are readily tossed here and there” (Morris, 215).

The word “rational understanding” or “mind” (*vous*) means “reason, sober sense . . . to keep their heads” (Robertson, 47); not “to lose their mind” (Jowett, 161). This indicates being “thrown off the course of sound thinking and reasoning” (Wycliffe, 832). Morris calls this “the whole mental balance of the man” (215) is affected. Findlay’s terms are a bit fancy but not fanciful: “the regulative intellectual faculty” (164) become irregular and certainly not intellectual.

The lack of this “balance” and “regulative intellectual faculty,” of course, would make them potentially easy prey to any perversions of truth about this subject, and likely to succumb to irrational, imbalanced, illogical, and senseless speculations about the Saviour’s “coming.”

The word “startled” (*throeisthai*) is in the present tense and means “to be in a constant state of nervous excitement” (Frame, 245); a continuing state of agitation following the definite shock received” (Robertson, 47) from senseless speculations.

The three cited ways by which such speculations could have occurred are (1) “spirit” or some divinely, supernatural medium; Gloag (23) suggests “prophetic discourses delivered by members of the Church in a state of excitement, announcing the immediate coming of Christ, and which were mistaken for Divine communication”; (2) “message” or “word” (KJV, Beck) or some spoken message from those pretending to be preachers; “oral statement, based in part perhaps on some calculation of contemporary history or certain *logia* [“sayings”] of Jesus” (Moffatt, 47); this could possibly include some simple, but nevertheless, misunderstanding of Paul’s words, or the deliberate twisting of his words in ways which were counter to his intended meaning; (3) “letter” or some written communication; perhaps a forgery, about some meaning or interpretation of certain verses, etc. – any, and all of which, may have been used by these “pretenders” or “pseudo-preachers” and claimed “as if from us.”

The word “here” may mean that the Lord has already come, but more likely that the second advent is imminent or “was about to strike . . . and they were not to

be so impressed with a sense of its immediateness as to be deprived of their sober reason” (Gloag, 24).

2:3a: “do not let anyone deceive you in any way”

The word “deceive” (*exapatese*) is found exclusively in Paul’s writings: Rom. 7:11; 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 11:3; and here. It means “*deceive, cheat, lead astray*” (BAG, 272); “tricks of any kind. It is amazing how gullible some of the saints are when a new deceiver pulls off some stunts in religion” (Robertson, 49).

E. Deification (2:3b-9)

2:3b: “because it will not come until the religious revolt comes first and the man of the lawlessness may be revealed, the son of destruction”

The Greek word *apostasia* is transliterated into English as “apostasy.” Its actual meaning, however, is “the rebellion, falling away”; “opposition to God” (Morris, 219), and so here translated “religious revolt.” The presence of the article “the” indicates that this definite ‘revolt’ was well-known among the readers, likely stemming from Paul’s precious instructions during his initial visit with them. Reference to “the man of the lawlessness” and his link with the religious revolt is the culmination of the revolt. This phrase occurs nowhere else in the NT, although he is designated “the lawless one” (*ho nomos*) in v. 8.

This “doomed figure is a supernatural antagonist to Jesus Christ at the end” (Moffatt, 48), the identity of which has been the subject of much speculation for centuries. There is no need to pursue such speculations here or to add to the ones already offered without conclusive and convincing substantial evidence. Suffice it to say that this “man of lawlessness is the mocking counterpart to the appearance of Jesus” (Milligan, 98).

The expression, “the son of perdition” is loaded with meaning. “‘Son of,’ in Biblical diction, expresses one’s nature, or one’s distinguishing characteristic, in the strongest manner” (Steven, 85).

The word “perdition” (*apoleias*) means “destruction” (Holmes, 231) and refers to “*the destiny*” (Stevens, 85) of the doomed figure. Milligan (99) notes it as “a term of direct antithesis, either stated or implied, to ‘salvation,’ full and complete blessedness.” [Paul uses this word elsewhere in Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9. The term’s most frequent use in a single NT writing is: 2 Pt. 2:1 (twice), 3; 3:7, 16. It also occurs in Mt. 7:13; 26:8; Mk. 14:4; Jn 17:12; Ac. 8:20; 25:16; Heb. 10:39; Rev. 17:8, 11.]

As Moffatt states: Paul’s “point is that the pseudo-Messiah or anti-Christ will embody all that is profane and blasphemous, every conceivable element of impiety” (48). Thus, additional descriptive characterizations of this one follow:

2:4: “who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship to take his seat in the temple of God proclaiming that he himself is God” The verb “opposes” (*antikeimenos*) refers to the action of the “adversary” (BAG, 73) and denotes “*to be set over against, lie opposite to, to be adverse to, withstand*” (Thayer, 50).

The word “exalts” (*hyperairomenos*) occurs only two other times in the NT: 2 Cor. 12:7 (twice). Here, it means the doomed figure “exalts himself in heart, tongue, style, and deeds, by himself and by his adherents” (Bengel, 497). And he does so in two primary ways: (1) “above every so-called god” – including angels and people in authoritative positions in the various domains of life; (2) “every object of worship” – emperors and others with wealth and distinguishing titles, as well as objects which carry people into patterns of adoration and devotion.

The term “object” (*sebasma*) “includes anything at all that can be worshipped. It is used of gods and images, but also of shrines, altars, etc. . . . it emphasizes the complete refusal of the Man of Lawlessness to brook any rival of any kind at all” (Morris, 222). He demands first place in the face of one and all as far as “supreme political position and religious veneration” (Ibid) are concerned.

These terms are somewhat vague, however, and “we can hardly hope to clear it up” (Robertson, 51) with sufficiently accurate information beyond what is here stated.

The expression, “to take his seat in the temple of God,” is his symbolic gesture of claiming ultimate spiritual authority which is “superior to any other called god” (Bengel, 498). His demands are so gigantic that he “demands that all other gods and objects of worship be set aside and he only be given recognition. Indeed, he insists that he is God and that he only is entitled to the worship accorded God” (Clarke, 327).

It is somewhat strange that Paul leaves the characterization of this wicked one almost hanging in the air. Despite our wishes that he would have continued, he chose not to do so. Hobbs thinks “he left it there, possibly because his meaning was perfectly clear to his readers” (292).

2:5: “Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I kept telling you these things?”

Support for the closing comment of Hobbs in v. 4 is somewhat strengthened here. In other words, he did, in fact, go into greater detail when he was with them and here “assumed their knowledge about it” (292). In fact, Frame suggests that there may be in this question “a trace of impatience. Paul is known to appeal not only to the knowledge of his readers (2:1) but also to his previous oral communications (3:4)” (258).

2:6: “And now you know what is holding [the lawless one] back, to be revealed in the opportune time”

At the present time, the lawless one is being held back by “what” (the principle of lawfulness and legality). This principle will manifest itself in a person (v. 7) who administers this principle.

The “holding back” or “restraining” (v. 7) is “the principle of order which restrains the working of evil” (Morris, 226). As Stauffer notes, “the civil power is set up as a bulwark against the powers of chaos, but it can only keep these powers in check, never really subdue them. The fight against them will never come to an end, and in the end must succumb to their final onslaught” (85).

Bonhoeffer supports this viewpoint: “the restrainer is the force of order . . . the power of the state to establish and maintain order” (44).

2:7: “For the mystery of lawlessness [is] already working, only the one restraining until he is taken out of the way”

The word “mystery” (*mysterion*) occurs in Mt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; and Lk. 8:10 and all in the same context: Jesus’ response to the question of the disciples about the parables of the kingdom of God. It occurs 4 times in the Revelation: 1:20 (“the seven stars”); 10:7 (“of God”); 17:5 (“Babylon the Great”), 7 (“the woman”). Paul uses it 20 times [Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16.], beyond his single use of the word in this verse where it is used exclusively in relation to “lawlessness.”

The word “mystery” tends to conjure up ideas of that which is concealed or unknown; something that is secretly-oriented. In the NT, however, it leans more toward the idea of something previously concealed (for various reasons: God’s timetable, man’s comprehension level, etc.) but now presently revealed (for various reasons: all the way from parabolic stories in the gospels to prophetic stars in the Revelation). Nevertheless, this “mystery of lawlessness” is mysterious in the sense that lawlessness always leads to trouble and punishment but people practice lawlessness, despite its inevitable heartaches, earthly punishments, and the ultimate punishments by God.

As seen throughout the history of mankind, “lawlessness or iniquity operates as a secret, invisible force [in the minds and hearts of human beings] in society and individuals [until seen in their actions and behaviors] . . . and is revealed in due time” (Airhart, 518).

See v. 7 for comments about “restraining.” The addition here is “until he is taken out of the way.” Elliott notes that this verse is a “confirmation of the preceding statement [v. 6] that the mystery of lawlessness is truly at work [now in partial and unorganized lawlessness], but its full manifestation cannot take place till the removal of the restraining power” (113). This removal of the restraining power of government regulations will occur “in God’s time. Despite the rebellion God will still be in control of events. In his own time he will remove the restraint that the lawless one may be revealed in his true character” (Hobbs, 292).

2:8: “and then the lawless one shall be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and shall destroy by the manifestation of His coming”

When this lawless one is revealed, “Christ will not only **slay** but will **destroy** him. ‘Destroy’ renders *katargeo*, to render inoperative or unworkable, like a machine that is shut off from its source of power. . . . In the presence of him who is truth, the false will be revealed in its real nature” (Hobbs, 293).

The word “slay” (*anelei*) means “do away with, kill, destroy; condemn to death; annual, abolish.”

The word “destroy” (*katargesei*) means “to render ineffective; nullify, cancel; abolish.” Thus, this lawless, rebellious one “will be overthrown at the unexpected appearance of Christ’s public and powerful manifestation . . . [even] the overthrow of all those rebellious toward God, of whom the rebel envisaged in this section is the archetypal figure” (Wanamaker, 258).

The “coming” or “the mere *appearing* of his presence suffices to destroy his adversary” (Vincent, 66).

2:9: “the one whose coming [is] according to the energy of Satan with all counterfeit power and signs and false wonders”

“No longer working in secret (2:7), this one whose activity is in accord with ‘the work of satan’ will openly manifest himself by means of ‘all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives” (Holmes, 234-235).

Jesus also came with “miracles, signs and wonders.” His, however, were truly true realities which pointed to the presence of God in His life and ministries. Since this imposter is full of evil, he is empowered by Satan to do Satan’s work. Since all these miracles, signs, and wonders are “counterfeit,” they only reveal the one with whom this lawless one is associated and whose representative he really is: Satan! All these miracles, signs and wonders, really benefit no one, especially the one who is behind their displays. They “all bear the stamp of fraud” (Vincent, 66).

Hobbs’ summary (293) is well-worth the read:

Lawlessness constantly works in the world, all of which is in reality rebellion against God. But it is restrained by civil government and power. In Paul’s day it was the Roman Empire and the Caesar. But the principle applies throughout history. At some future time this lawlessness will become so great that God will remove the restraining power. Rebellion will be rampant and unfettered. In such a time the man of lawlessness will emerge. He will deceive men who have refused the truth of the gospel. He will do so by working false signs which are imitations of Jesus’ miracles. He will defy all semblance

of deity and divine worship, taking his seat in God's temple, seeking to replace God, and will proclaim himself to be God. When he shall have reached this extremity of lawlessness toward God, Christ will appear to consume him and render inoperative his work – and this by the breath of Christ's mouth!

F. Deception (2:10-12)

2:10: “and with all the deception of wickedness for those who are being destroyed, because they did not receive the love of the truth in order to be saved”

The words “the deception of wickedness” refers to “wickedness” which results from “the deception.” This deception is “characteristic of unrighteousness and is employed by it” (Vincent, 66).

Those who are “employed by it” are “those who are being destroyed” (*apollumenois*) by the false and counterfeit attractions of miracles, signs, and wonders. This present tense verb indicates that this destruction is already in motion, an ongoing process with deadly and dreadful consequences both in the present and in the future. It is spiritual malware – “a multitude of malicious variants of both attitudes and actions which infect, explore, steal, and conduct virtually any ungodly behaviors the adversary wants.”

The essence of this spiritual malware, however, is seen in its cancerous root: “they did not receive the love of the truth in order to be saved.” This reflects the words of John 1:11: “they received Him not.” The refusal to “believe” is the refusal to “receive” (John 1:12).

These words of Paul “hint at a criminal indifference to their eternal welfare” (Stevens, 90).

2:11: “and for this reason, God sent them deceptive activity to believe what is false”

The refusal to “receive the love of the truth” leads to God's only alternative: “deceptive activity to believe what is false.” That is, God “takes off the bridle when they reject the love of truth in favor of Satan's lie through the lawless one. Thus they rush to their own destruction. . . . The beginning of sin is to forsake God; the end of sin is to be God-forsaken” (Hobbs, 294).

2:12: “in order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth but was pleased with unrighteousness”

The word “judged” (*krithosin*) means “condemned, damned.” Thus, “the tools and the victims of Satan are destroyed” (Moffatt, 50). Such is the inevitable result for those who are “pleased with wickedness.” It denotes their insatiable “desire.”

The word “pleased” (*eudokesantes*) means “to choose, to take delight or pleasure in; to will, to resolve, to be content with.”

The word “wickedness” (*adikias*) means “unrighteousness, wrongdoing, evil, sin, injustice.”

So, with shocking repercussions, “here, as implied in ver. 10, the opposite of belief is viewed, not merely as intellectual non-belief, or even disbelief, but as a desire of unrighteousness” (Stevens, 90).

Here Paul “pictures a growing rebellion against God, the emergence of one who was the devil incarnate as Christ had been God incarnate, a final struggle and the ultimate triumph of God” (Barclay, 213).

Barclay’s presentation (213) of permanent truths are noted:

- (1) There is a force of evil in the world. We hide our heads in the sand if we deny that there is an evil power at work amongst men.
- (2) God is in control. Things may seem to be crashing to chaos but in some strange way even the chaos is in God’s control.
- (3) The ultimate triumph of God is sure. In the end nothing can stand against him. The Lawless One may have his day but there comes a time when God says, ‘Thus far and no farther.’ And so the great question is, ‘On what side are you? In the struggle at the heart of the universe are you for God – or Satan?’

III ELECTED FOR SALVATION (2:13-3:15)

G. Celebration (2:13-14)

2:13: “And we must keep on giving thanks to God for you, brothers who are being loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in [the] truth”

The verb “must” (*opheilomen*) is the same word used in 1:3 to convey a strong “sense of obligation” (Robertson, 41) “to keep on giving thanks to God always” (present tense). Here, however, he adds the pronoun “we” as the opening word in this verse “as reiterating the fact that their founders are bound to thank God for their condition in spite of the discouragement of some of their converts” (Bicknell, 94).

The affectionate noun, “brothers,” is used for the third time in this letter (1:3; 2:1), a word used nineteen times in his first letter (1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 6, 10 (twice), 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 26, 27). It will be used again in this letter in v. 15; 3:1, 6 (twice), 13, 15.

The verb “being loved” (*egapemenoi*) is in the perfect tense, passive voice to indicate that an ongoing vertical dimension of love from above is now added to the horizontal dimensions of being “brothers.” This additional feature of affection will be noted again by this verb in v. 16. Thus, Paul will have used this verb twice in

his first letter (1:4; 4:9) and twice in this one.

This thanksgiving and love are seen in the context of God taking the initiative in calling (v. 14) people to Himself. The word “chose” (*eilato*) occurs only two other times in the NT: Phil. 1:22; Heb. 11:25. It communicates the fact that the calling of God in salvation “rests on the divine choice, not on human effort” (Morris, 237). In fact, this divine choice occurred in the context of eternity – “from the beginning” - without any relation to time, talents, or even transgressions.

In fact, they were “chosen” for deliverance from “transgressions” (i.e., “for salvation”) before they even recognized the need for such deliverance. This divine choice before time was realized in time at the time of their initial conversion. Two aspects of this being “chosen” by God are isolated: (1) “by the sanctification of the Spirit” – The noun “sanctification” (*hagiasmo*) means to be “set apart by God and for consecrated, single-minded devotion to the service of God.” This setting apart for holiness is made possible exclusively by the Holy Spirit. (2) “faith in [the] truth” – The word “faith” (*pistei*) is the noun form of the verb “believe” (*pisteuo*) and indicates commitment to God in relation to the “truth” of the gospel. Although this involves an initial act of human response, it also involves a lifelong pursuit of the “truth” of God’s gospel in discipleship.

2:14: “and for this He called you through our gospel to gain [the] glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”

The words “for this” refer back to the two aspects of their being “chosen” in v. 13.

Paul now continues with his train of thought about God’s eternal choice of his readers to its being actuated or brought to pass in their lives within history: “He called you.” Both the choosing and the calling of God lie in Him alone.

The word “through” (*dia*) indicates the means by which God’s call took place: i.e., the preaching of the gospel, so as to “gain” or “share in the power of the gospel of Christ [and] share also in his victory” (Bailey, 332). John 17:24 refers to this sharing in His glory because they belong to Him.

Morris (239) and Holmes (253) think the glory here referred to is “the future glory.” Wycliffe links this with 1:3: “This revelation of Christ’s glory in believers will be amazing and wonderful to all who behold it” (831). Stevens thinks it refers to “that glory into which our Lord has entered” (95). Lenski/Luther suggest “called to be ‘Christ’s glorious possession’” (442). Gloag (27) states: “to be possessors or sharers in the glory of Jesus Christ. Believers are constituted ‘heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.’”

Airhart provides a concise perspective: “It is clear that our salvation is rooted in love, planned in eternity, initiated in time, and consummated in glory. Essentially, salvation is all of grace since it is originated in God’s loving choice, wrought through the power of God’s Spirit, bestowed by answering God’s call, and perfected in the glory of God’s Son” (524).

H. Command (2:15)

2:15: “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which you were taught, whether by means of word or letter from us”

Despite God’s initiative in both “choosing” and “calling,” cooperation is, nevertheless, required on the part of those chosen and called. In other words, “the divine purpose does not work automatically, but implies the cooperation of Christians – in this case, a resolute steadfastness resting on loyalty to the apostolic gospel” (Moffatt, 50). Indeed, the verb “stand firm” (*stekete*) is a present tense, imperative mood, which demands rigorous and regular resistance to the forces of evil which seek to discourage, deflect, dishearten, and dislodge his readers from the demands of discipleship which are disclosed in the gospel. The second present tense imperative, “hold fast” (*krateite*) means “to take hold of, to seize” and is followed by “traditions” (*paradoseis*), which this commentary takes as likely the object of both verbs. These traditions were those teachings from the apostles about various facets of Jesus and the Christian faith. That is, it refers to “the whole body of teaching, practical and doctrinal, which Paul shared with others and had conveyed to the Thessalonians **either by word of mouth or by letter**” (Bailey, 332). The letter is likely 1 Thessalonians and possibly others. In his book, *The Early Church*, Cullmann explores the role of “tradition” and its impact within and upon the Christian faith (59-99). Dunn provides a much briefer look at the role of tradition in his book, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (66-69f). He isolates the kerygmatic, church, ethical, and pastoral traditions.

I. Comfort (2:16-17)

2:16: “And may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father Who loved us and gave us eternal encouragement and good hope in/by grace”

The first word in this verse is “Himself” in reference to both “our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father.” Hobbs (295) suggests that Jesus is here mentioned first because of His “prominence in v. 14.” Lenski, however, says the pronoun applies to both of them. Thus, by this mutual application and by naming both of them, Paul “places them on an equality” (Lenski, 444). Cp. John 10:30; 12:45; 14:9.

The words “loved” (*agapesas*) and “gave” (*dous*) are both aorist participles and refer to point actions. The point of “loved” is the cross-resurrection-ascension-exaltation theme of the NT. The point of “gave” is explained in the words (1) “eternal encouragement” (which is urgently needed in light of the afflictions and discouragements which dot the hallways of life); that is, “encouragement that will outlast the afflictions of this age and the judgment to come, that sustains us until we experience fully eternal life” (Holmes, 255); and (2) “good

hope” (as opposed to no hope – and because of sharing the glory of Christ (v. 14), the initial gift of the Spirit and the permanent possession of that gift . . . all of which is genuine and victorious (Frame, 286-287).

The words “in/by grace” are added to “stress that God’s love, as well as the divine gifts of encouragement and hope, are based on God’s unmerited favor freely bestowed” (Wanamaker, 271).

2:17: “encourage and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

The verb “encourage” (*parakalesai*) is in the optative mood which indicates a “wish” for comfort. The verb “strengthen” (*sterizai*) is also in the optative mood as another “wish” for uplift and courage. Both are “in contrast to the disquiet and confusion of 2:2” (Moffatt, 51). This word will be used again: 3:3. Paul uses this word elsewhere: Rom. 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2, 13.

The word “hearts” (*kardias*) “stands for the whole of the inner life” (Morris, 243).

The phrase “every good work and word” is “a comprehensive phrase encompassing all of human behavior” (Holmes, 255). Even though Paul has expressed much thanksgiving and gratitude for his readers and “the strong witness they have already given to the meaning of the Christian gospel, he desires that they may abound more and more in the fruits of Christian faith and experience” (Bailey, 333).

J. Concerns (3:1-2)

3:1: “Finally, keep on praying for us, brothers, that the word of the Lord may continue to spread and continue to be glorified – just as it did with you”

Paul knew the brothers had already been praying for him, Silvanus, and Timothy, and so here he directives them to keep on praying (present tense verb). Rather than a general sense of praying, he pinpoints or specifies three specific concerns of prayer: (1) “that the word of the Lord may continue to spread” – The verb “may continue to spread” (*trecho*) portrays “the word of the Lord” as a runner in an athletic contest who is “speeding on to success and triumph” (Airhart, 526). This concern was obviously for Paul and his associates but probably was meant by Paul to include all who were actively involved in outreach efforts with the gospel. (2) “continue to be glorified” – The verb “glorified” means that the word of the Lord will be recognized for what it is (God’s word – not just speculations by humans) and received so as to transform lives – “just as it did with you.”

3:2: “and that we may be rescued from the outrageous and evil men; for not all have faith”

The (3) concern was “that we may be rescued from the outrageous and evil men” – The word “outrageous” (*atopon*) means “improper, wrong; out of place, harmful.” The word “evil” (*poneron*) means “bad, sinful, worthless, malignant.” Together they “convey the idea of morally perverse people who maliciously obstruct the gospel” (Holmes, 256). Cp. Acts 17:5. These wicked opponents of the gospel typify or illustrate the truth that “not all have faith,” as evidenced in their hostility to it.

K. Confidence (3:3-5)

3:3: “But the Lord is faithful, Who shall strengthen us and guard us from the evil one”

Paul now changes channels to display the positive side of the matter: his confidence in God and, therefore, also in them (v. 4).

Despite the fact that all do not have “faith” (*pistis*), God is “faithful” (*pistos*). His faithfulness is seen from a two-fold perspective in this verse: (1) “shall strengthen us” (*sterixeî*) is the same word in 2:17 to depict “inward rooting and grounding” (Lenski, 449). (2) “shall guard us” (*phulaxeî*) refers to being “protected against evil” (Wanamaker, 276) or “protection from outward assaults” (Lenski, 449). Paul uses this word seven other times: Rom. 2:26; Gal. 6:13; 1 Tim. 5:21; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12, 14; 4:15. [It occurs also in Mt. 19:20; Mk. 10:20; Lk. 2:8; 8:29; 11:21, 28; 12:15; 18:21; Jn. 12:25; 17:12; Acts. 7:53; 12:4; 16:4; 21:24, 25; 22:20; 23:35; 28:16; 2 Pt. 2:5; 3:17; 1 Jn. 5:21; Jude 24.]

3:4: “And we possess confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and shall continue to do what we are commanding”

Paul’s confidence in his readers is rooted in his “confidence in the Lord.” Obedience to the Lord is an essential component of faith and an expression of it. Verse 3 “assures the readers that the Lord is working in their presence while v. 4 indirectly requires obedience in response to what the Lord is doing” (Wanamaker, 277).

Paul’s confidence that they “shall continue to do what we are commanding” is a prelude to the commands in verses 6-15. But those commands are not given without another prelude of prayer in v. 5.

3:5: “And may the Lord direct/guide your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance like Christ”

Paul’s prayer is pinpointed with a twofold perspective: (1) “your hearts into the love of God” – that is, the love which God has for them. When difficult times with people, places, and things occur, this sort of direction or guidance is

a much needed reminder. (2) “the endurance like Christ” - that is, the endurance and perseverance which Christ Himself constantly displayed. Thus, walk in His steps.

The readers’ awareness of Paul’s twofold prayer in their behalf would surely increase their own confidence in the spiritual warfare at hand.

L. Caution/Counsel (3:6-15)

There are three words in the Thessalonian letters which appear nowhere else in the NT: the adjective *ataktos* – the adverb *ataktos* {long o} – the verb *atakteo*. In 1 Thess. 5:14, the adjective “disordered ones” (*tous ataktous*) were the idle ones or “those who had broken ranks” (Hobbs, 284). They had become “undisciplined, irresponsible, disorderly” (Holmes, 180). It “characterizes a man as one who sets himself outside the necessary and given order. . . . It does not in the first instance lay emphasis on sloth but on an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work. . . . an undisciplined life in the secular sphere contradicts the direction under which the Christian stands” (Delling, 47-48).

This is the only occurrence of this adjective in the NT. The adverb occurs twice in v. 6 and 11. The verb occurs in v. 7. The meanings noted above should be consulted when studying their occurrences in the following verses.

3:6: “Now we are giving commands to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the traditions which you received from us”

The “name” (*onomati*) indicates “authority,” so his “commands” are given in with divine authority – no mere suggestions as how to make friends and influence people.

The word “keep away” (*stellesthai*) means “to move oneself from or to withdraw oneself from” (Robertson, 58).

In violation of the “traditions” they had received from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, their “disorderly” walk was a form of truancy (Barclay, 217-218). Airhart suggests (529): “Due perhaps to excitement about the coming of the Lord, the disorderly brethren were loafing, refusing to work, turning from their duties, and accepting no responsibility [but] meddlesome conduct (v. 11) and even dependence on others for support (v. 12).”

3:7: “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did not behave disorderly among you”

He supports his persuasion that they should “imitate us” by way of their experiential knowledge of how he and his associates behaved during their former time in Thessalonica. It was the exact opposite of “disorderly.” They had been models worthy of imitation. He further expands their recollection of model behavior in

v. 8.

3:8: “nor did we eat anyone’s bread for nothing, but with labor and hardship we were working night and day to not be a financial burden to any of you”

Their hard work had made them financially independent and thus avoided any charges by the adversaries that they were the real moochers. In other words, they were conscientious or “careful to avoid the charge that they were parasites or spongers” (Airhart, 530).

3:9: “not because we did not have authority, but in order to give ourselves as a model for you to imitate us”

Paul admits, however, that they had apostolic authority or the right to receive such support. But to avoid any charges which would harm the cause of Christ they waived any such rights. Plus, again, as noted in v. 7, their desire was to be models or practitioners of what they advocated and attacked in the disorderly ones.

3:10: “for even when we were with you, we used to give you this, that if someone will not work neither should he eat”

He continues to strengthen the matter by reminding them of something he had said in their presence: a proverb-like statement – “if someone will not work neither should he eat.” This, and everything else that was said and done while Paul and his associates were in Thessalonica was for their good. They should remember it all and even use their behaviors and words against the disorderly ones who “needed to be faced with the stern practicalities of life and jolted out of their irresponsible conduct” (Airhart, 530).

3:11: “For we hear some among you are disorderly doing nothing but busy being busy bodies”

In light of the Lord’s soon-expected return or even other reasons perhaps, some of these “brothers” (cp. 3:15) had become “theological dead-beats who were too pious to work, but perfectly willing to eat at the hands of their neighbors while they piddled and frittered away the time in idleness” (Robertson, 60). They were sticking their noses in other people’s business – “busy – not at work – but being busy bodies.” – “busy only in other people’s affairs” (J. B. Phillips).

As Airhart observes: “There is hardly a more damaging influence in the church than the gossiping tongue of an idle or footloose member” (531).

3:12: “Now such ones we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that

working with quietness they may eat their own bread”

It is to and/or about the disorderly ones that the command and exhortation of this verse are directed. Instead of fostering restlessness and discord, they, again in the words of Phillips, are to “settle down to work and eat food they have earned themselves.” The old maxim certainly applies here: “Less noise and more work!”

3:13: “But you, brothers, do not grow weary in well-doing”

The word “but” indicates “in contrast to the disorderly ones,” the other brothers are not to be discouraged, lose courage, give in or give up, but to “keep on doing what is right.”

3:14: “and if anyone does not obey our instructions in this letter, take note of that one, and have no dealings with him, in order that he may be ashamed”

The first class (“if”) assumes that some will not obey these instructions, so, Paul says to “take note of that one” – i.e., “put a tag on that man” (Robertson, 60) – as one to be avoided. This term (*semeiousthe* – “a tag of formal notice”) occurs here only in the NT.

The end result of such avoidance is that “he may be ashamed” (*entrape*) – that is, “to have one’s thoughts turned in on oneself” (Robertson, 61). This will hopefully lead to repentance.

3:15: “yet not do not consider him an enemy, but admonish as a brother”

The word “enemy” (*echthron*) indicates “hate,” and hatred itself is to be avoided. Rather, “admonish” (*noutheteite* – a present tense imperative) – that is, “warn, teach” him as a “brother.” There are, perhaps, few things in a Christian congregation of believers which pose more needed delicacy than how to properly discipline the disorderly. Any methods which are not in concert with love and restoration are themselves to be avoided.

IV EXPRESSIONS OF SECURITY (3:16-18)

D. Conditionless Affirmation (3:16)

3:16: “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give peace to you in every circumstance. The Lord [be] with you all.”

After some rather “stormy and stern passages” (Airhart, 533) throughout this letter, Paul’s affectionate and compassionate leanings for his readers are, once

again, embodied in this conditionless affirmation. Paul employs the optative mood again in this highly charged wish for “peace” to His readers. His “wish” for the best is couched in “the Lord of peace Himself.” In his first letter at 5:23, he directs attention to “the God of peace.” He, of course, has already mentioned “peace” in 1:2. This includes both peace with God and the peace of God which finds its ultimate completion, expression, and experience in Christ alone.

The additional phrase, “the Lord [be] with you all,” is an inclusive statement that none are to be excluded from his affirmation.

E. Custom of Authenticity (3:17)

3:17: “I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is a distinguishing mark in every letter; I write in this manner.”

When letters were being dictated to one who performed the actual writing, it was customary for the one dictating to take the writing instrument and write something in his own handwriting. It was like the modern practice of placing one’s signature at the end of a typed letter.

Here, of course, we do not have the copy of the original letter and do not know if Paul only wrote this verse or verses 16-18. But whatever the exact words were, they were written to bear witness to the genuineness and authenticity of the letter as being from him. This would help to prevent forgery and any other questions or accusations any enemy forces might render. His notice that this practice was “a distinguishing mark” in every letter he wrote is, in itself, a mark of integrity (honesty, sincerity, uprightness).

F. Comprehensiveness of Aspiration (3:18)

3:18: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all.”

As occurs in his first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul’s second letter to them both begins and ends with “grace.” The only difference is that here he adds the word “all.”

Indeed, the Christian life begins, continues, and ends or culminates in “grace.” In the words of John Newton:

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;

‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The closing words of Airhart (535) deserve repeating: “God’s grace, for Paul, is free, universal, all-sufficient, and extended through the atoning merits of Jesus Christ. Like a loving and concerned parent separated from children who are facing perils unknown, Paul, in this benediction, commends to the secure keeping of God his beloved Thessalonians.”

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